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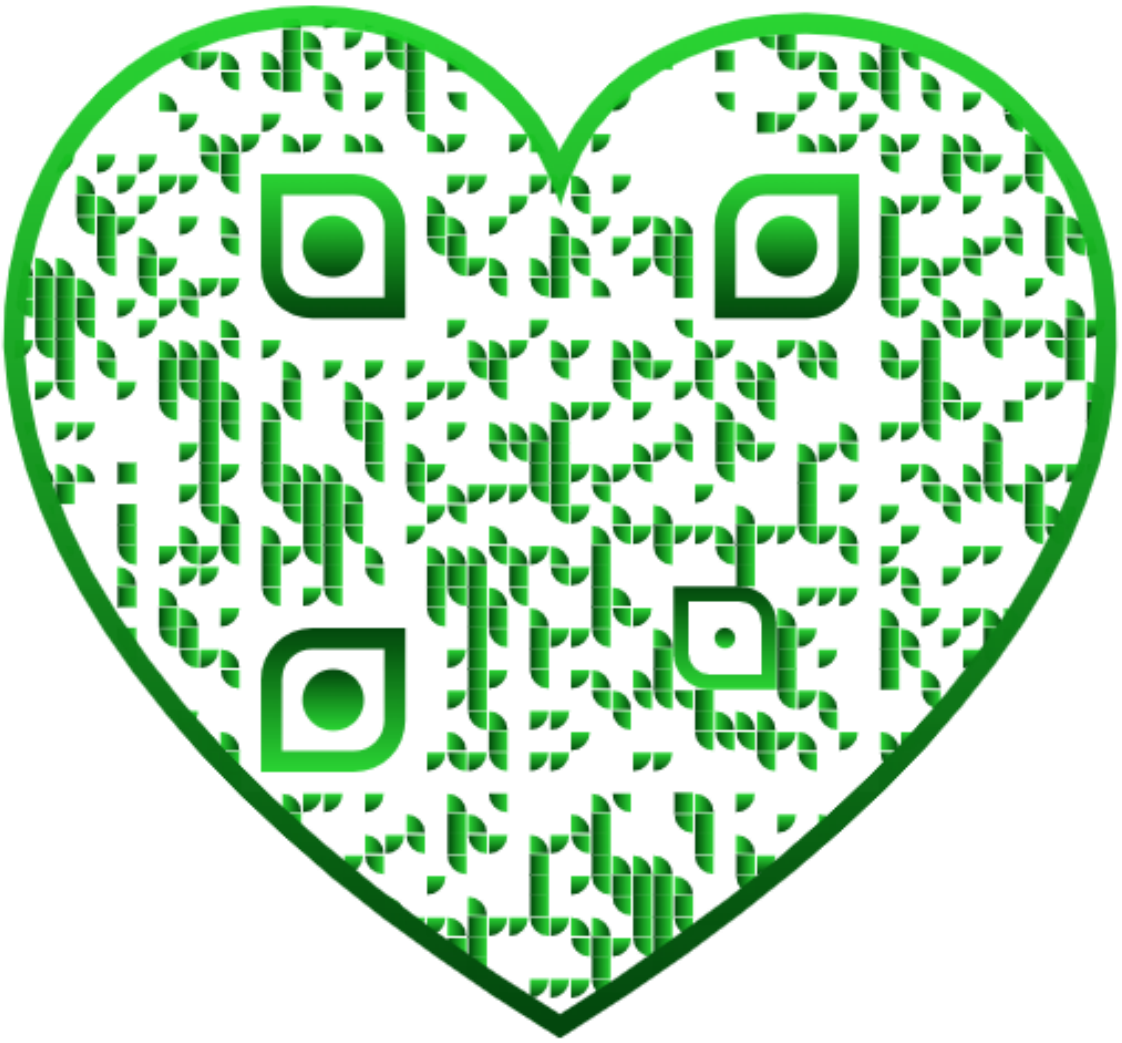

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Attenuating Circumstances

What's the one thing that unites almost every guitarist on the planet? From fledglings grappling with their first chord shapes to leathery stadium-rock legends, everybody plays guitar at home. Of course, members of rock's royal family probably don't have to worry about the noise waking up the neighbours when they are jamming away in their palatial homes or super-yachts, but for most of us mere mortals, volume is an issue.

A great guitar tone that works for you will make playing more enjoyable – and will help you play better, too. But what if you get your kicks from the tactile compression and harmonic bloom of a good valve amp set to its sweet spot? How do you get a similar sound and feel at home without the associated volume? Turn to p24 to read this month's cover feature in which we present 40 ways to turn the volume down at home and still sound great.

Our advice isn't limited to living room or bedroom playing either; I write this having played three gigs over the weekend ranging in size from a pub to a festival tent, and my 20-watt 1x12 combo (set to about 11 o'clock as opposed to turned up to 11) was deemed too loud by all three sound engineers. Time to say goodbye to that sweet spot and work a bit harder without all that lovely natural compression to fall back on. And probably to accept the fact that everyone is listening to the lead singer anyway...

If you've got any great volume-reducing tips that don't kill your tone to share, write to us at theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com – we'll print the best ones on our letters page. See you next month.

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Turn to **page 22** to take advantage of this month's special *The Guitar Magazine* subscription offer.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

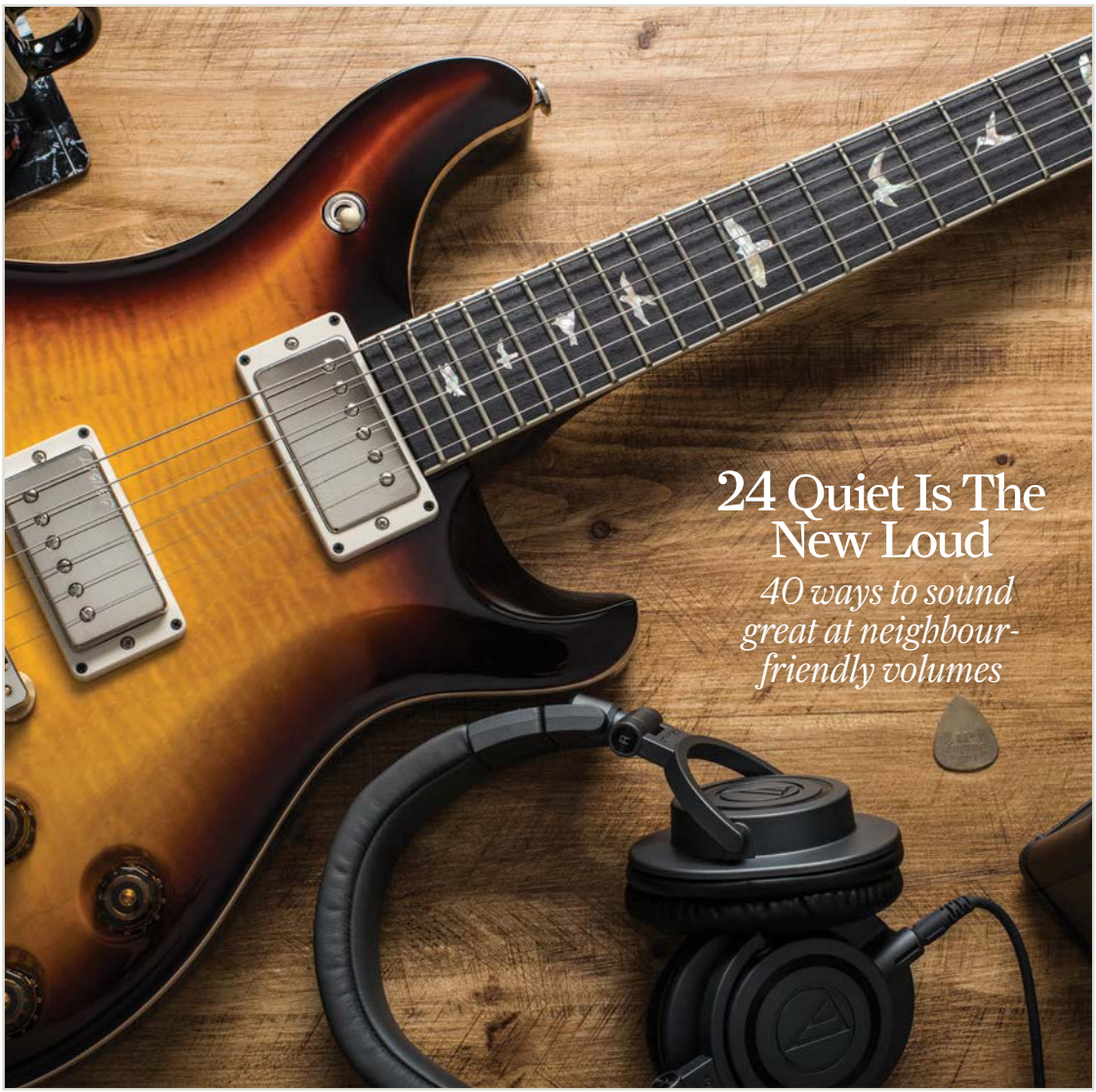
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p12

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker



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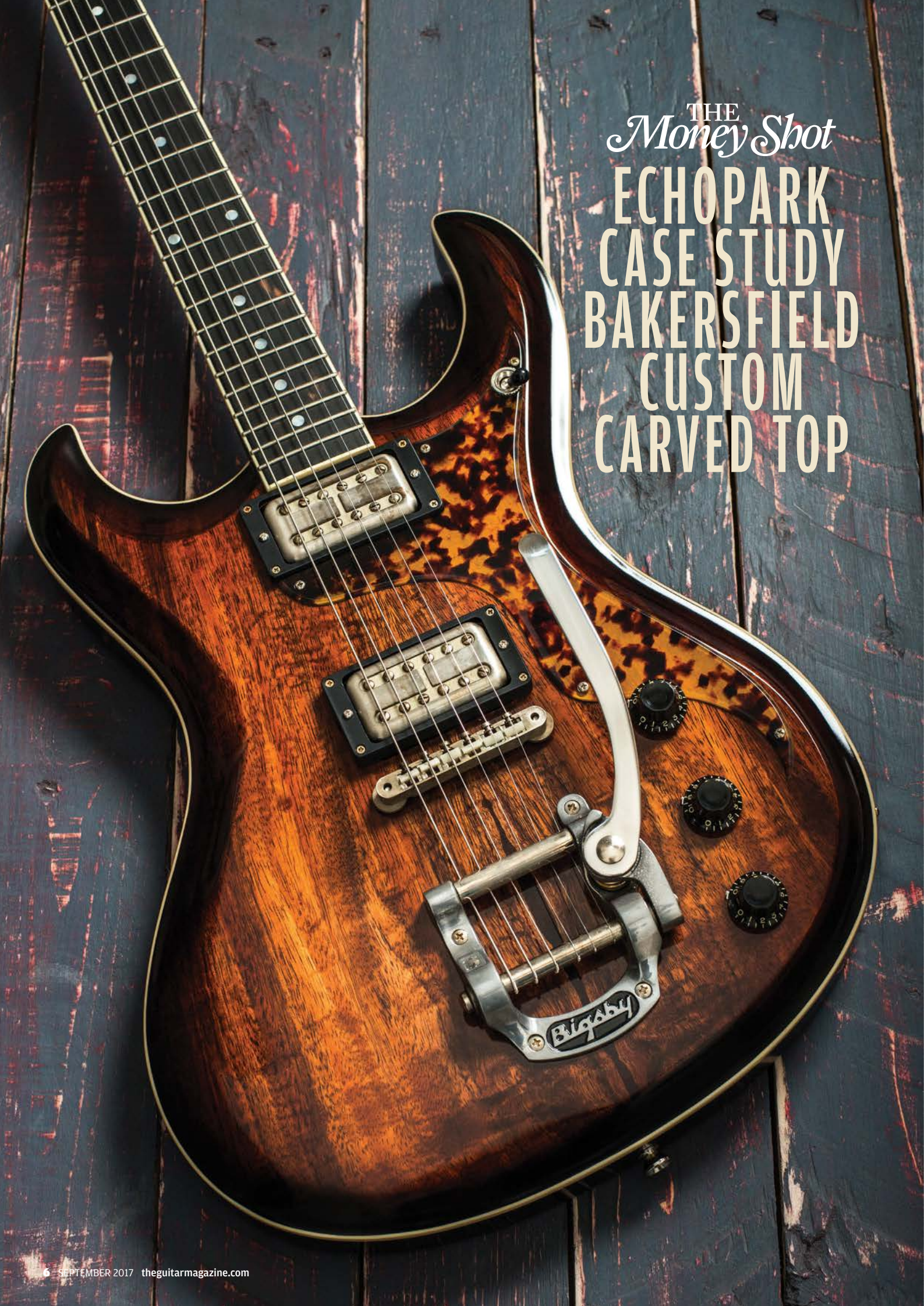

THE *Money Shot*

ECHOPARK CASE STUDY BAKERSFIELD CUSTOM CARVED TOP

We've been wowed by Gabriel Currie's creations before, and this is no exception – it's is a symphony of aged tonewoods. The Mosrite-esque body is old-stock Honduran mahogany, topped with hand-carved old-stock figured koa and finished in nitro 'Echoburst'. The fretboard is old-stock figured ebony, while the neck is old-stock Honduran mahogany – and it's genuinely one of the finest we've ever played. A compound large V profile rounds out to a D up top, but the depth never feels excessive and melts into the palm thanks to beautifully dressed shoulders. Nitrate dots and 'guard complete the picture and plugged in – courtesy of a set of Arcane Echotron pickups – the Bakersfield Custom has muscular twang in spades. Visit coda-music.com for more.

WIN A *Seymour Duncan Andromeda* do-it-all delay pedal WORTH £285!

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The **Seymour Duncan Andromeda** is one of the most feature-packed delay pedals around, and now we're giving one lucky *The Guitar Magazine* reader the chance to win one for yourself!

The Andromeda is a programmable digital stereo delay, which offers echo types of every flavour – from lush analog delays to vibey tape echoes, through pristine digital repeats, and even a unique blend of all three! You can further tweak the eight onboard delay types with the tone knob (to brighten or darken the repeats), the saturation control (to add some classic tape machine grit) and the modulation knob (which adds chorus or vibrato to the echo). Add in MIDI control, tap tempo and a trails feature, and you have a unit that can cover the whole gamut of delay sounds, and let you edit and save those sounds to call up later.

The Guitar Magazine's Syd Edwards was hugely impressed with the Andromeda when he reviewed it last month, noting that, "Whatever you imagine of your ultimate delay pedal, the Andromeda has probably beaten you to it. A comprehensive, fabulous sounding, feature-packed delay that's suitable for all applications." For more information, head to **www.seymourduncan.com**, and to be in with the chance of winning this supremely versatile pedal, visit the link below and answer the following question.

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/andromeda

Competition question:
Which of the following is a Seymour Duncan pickup?
A PAF **B** Filter'Tron **C** Pearly Gates

Ones TO *Watch*

LAUCAN

More Laurel Canyon than Lewes, **JOSH GARDNER** finds out where the singer-songwriter found his affinity for ethereal vocals and interesting fingerpicked guitar...

When Laurence Galpin's band broke up, he responded by retreating to the safety of his bedroom and began writing, but he didn't really want anyone in the house to hear his new creations at first. In order to keep things quiet, he started singing in falsetto for the first time – it was a transformative moment. Taking the stage name Laucan (pronounced 'lor-can'), Laurence fused his ethereal new vocal style with a delicate fingerpicked electric style developed through a diet Richard Thompson and other folk luminaries, to create the dreamy psychedelic folk soundscapes found across his debut album, *FramesPerSecond*.

"I never really intended to be a 'folk' artist, although I love folk music," Laurence tells us of that happy accident. "It's just the way the songs came about, just me and a guitar."

And if his Buckley-esque vocals are the first thing that sets Laucan's music apart from the folky singer-songwriter crowd, the guitar is a close second. There's an elegant and hypnotic beauty here – his Gibson ES-175 ornamented with a dash of effects, allowing his interesting inversions and intricate patterns to really shine. "There's lots of double-tracking, and just subtle tremolo and delays," he says of the tones on record. "I'm really happy with the sound."

Despite the delicate nature of his guitar, his music isn't threadbare – with subtle synths, loops and distinctive string arrangements layered in the mix to create a studio product that's deeper than your basic folk fare.

"I was always hearing the parts I had yet to add, the rhythms and strings and stuff," admits Laurence of writing with just him and his guitar. "I'd say I do have an inclination to avoid the obvious option. I'd played for a long time in a standard guitar/bass/drums band, and I think I just wanted to take the opportunity to put together a slightly unusual set-up. There was influence from folk music, but also I wanted to create a more cinematic aesthetic, and contrast this organic instrumentation with some electronic elements."

Like many artists, Laurence's music-obsessed family and the surroundings he grew up, in have been key touchstones for him, with producer Andrew Philips, and cellist/strings arranger Jude Tedaldi helping him to use these influences to add depth to his music.

"The first house I lived in was in a small village in Sussex, and I love the South Downs," he explains. "I've tried to incorporate something of the outdoors in to the music. I remember hearing vibrant strings in the kitchen, perhaps Vivaldi's Four Seasons, and my Dad playing Lou Reed on piano. We recorded it all down in Brighton, which is near where I grew up, so it was nice to have that as a reference point, too."

It wasn't just a thematic influence either – his home is an audible part of *FramesPerSecond*. "There are some snippets of found sounds from around Sussex," he explains. "With a lot of the album being very reflective, I think it was great to feel that connection to home."

TRY IF YOU LIKE Jeff Buckley

DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

MICHAEL STEVENS LES PLANK

The man who played a huge part in establishing Fender's Custom Shop now makes one-off custom electrics. **DAVE HUNTER** finds out just what makes this plank so special...

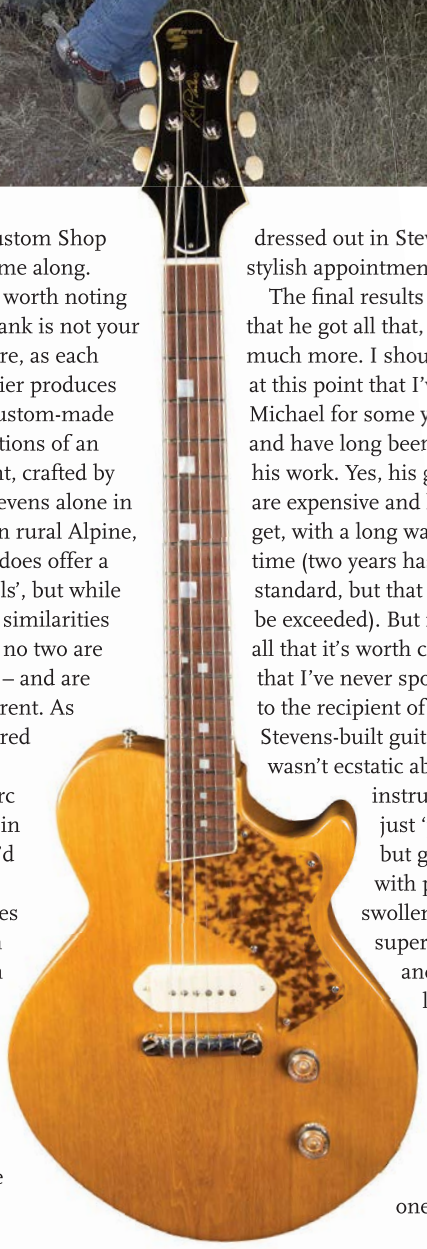
These days, the so-called 'boutique' market is veritably overflowing with the kind of skill and artistry that represents a true renaissance in the craft. Yet there's one name that players familiar with this scene murmur with unbridled respect and awe: Michael Stevens. Stevens was originally a highly respected independent guitar maker, building and repairing for stars initially in his native Texas, then in California and well beyond. However, in 1986, Fender's then-Vice President Dan Smith came to him with the notion of starting a Custom Shop to help restore Fender's glory, which you may have read a little about in our first Founders Keepers feature with Michael last month.

The venture established the most legendary 'special ops' department of any major guitar manufacturer, and Stevens crafted instruments for even more legendary artists in the process. On his own, and over the course of several years heading the Custom Shop, he turned his hand to custom-made instruments for Eric Clapton, Danny Gatton, Junior Brown, Jimmy Page and Roscoe Beck, among others. He also designed the LJ model – Fender's first effort to take on Gibson's dominance in the set-neck, dual-humbucker realm. A mere 30 or so LJs were made by Stevens and the Custom Shop team (which, surprisingly, had Stevens's name on the headstock rather than the familiar Fender brand), and they are among the most desirable former 'new-production' Fenders today. Fast-forward nearly three decades and Stevens is still making LJs, but it's hard to say whether you'd get one faster by putting your name down for a new one, or by hanging around waiting for one of those

If you could only have one guitar, it would be hard to complain if this were the one

The Les Plank's subtle contours hug the guitar close to you without any annoying angles, while the attention to detail and build elsewhere is truly faultless

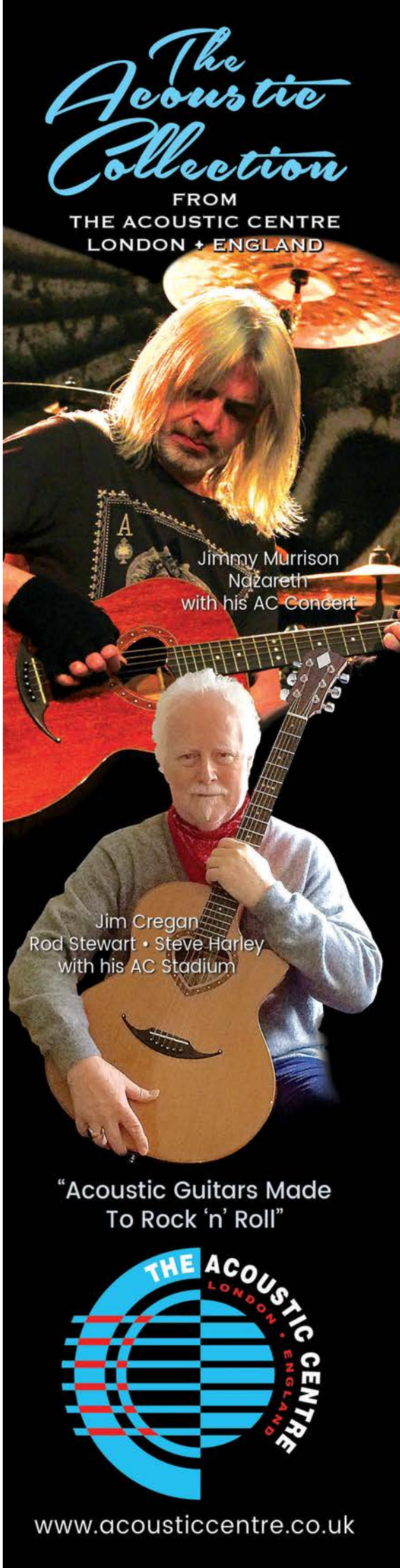
All images © Jeff Fisher

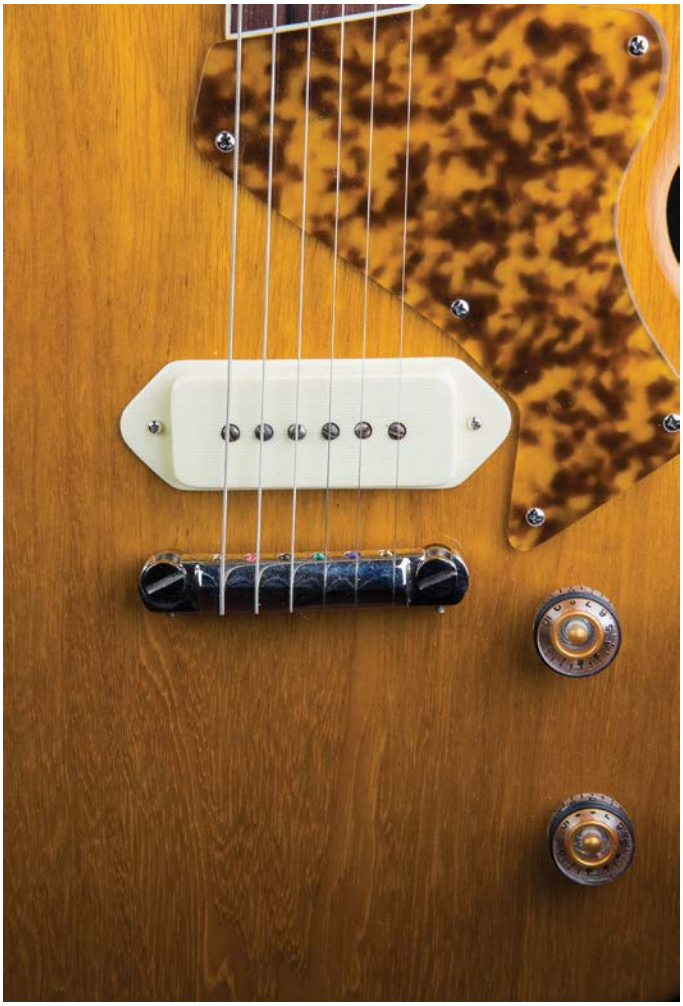


few original Custom Shop examples to come along.

It's probably worth noting that this Les Plank is not your usual review fare, as each guitar this luthier produces is a one-off – custom-made to the specifications of an individual client, crafted by Stevens and Stevens alone in his workshop in rural Alpine, Texas. Stevens does offer a range of 'models', but while there might be similarities between them, no two are quite the same – and are often very different. As such, our featured guitar comes courtesy of Marc Fisher, a client in Ohio who spec'd the flat-topped, plank-bodied Les Plank model in solid Korina, in the original Gibson scale length, bearing a single 1956 Gibson P-90, which he chose himself, and dressed out in Stevens's stylish appointments.

The final results indicate that he got all that, and so much more. I should confess at this point that I've known Michael for some years, and have long been a fan of his work. Yes, his guitars are expensive and hard to get, with a long waiting time (two years has been standard, but that can often be exceeded). But in light of all that it's worth considering that I've never spoken to the recipient of a new Stevens-built guitar who wasn't ecstatic about the instrument; not just 'pleased' but gushing with praise, swollen with a superlatives, and now living in a strange new utterly GAS-less existence. "The one thing





This Les Plank has been spec'd with an original 1956 Gibson P-90 pickup

that comes to mind most when playing it, and trying some futile comparisons between guitars and rigs, is that this guitar is just inspiring," says Fisher. "All the way around. It makes me want to do inspiring things when I play it or look at it. Michael's use of angles may be equal to Picasso or any famous deconstructionist. No luthier and very few artists are able to handle that many curves, angles and lines and not only make them work, but make them seem both artistic and natural. The same thing applies to the tone and playing feel of this… it's an overall inspiration towards art and utility; tell me that isn't something every guitarist needs more of, right?"

So, he likes it – and it's easy to see why. Outwardly 'just' a hifalutin, custom-made alt-LP Junior, this Les Plank is truly so much more once you strap it on. When guitarists talk of 'playing feel' we are usually thinking left-hand, as in the feel of the neck, but this guitar has an exalted feel everywhere. Little things, such as the way the neck heel is angled and bevelled to ease upper-fret access without breaking from the lines and angles of the overall design, or the back contours for both ribcage and thigh, so there are no sharp edges digging in anywhere when you play, or sheer balance of the overall build… they all add up to something very big. Then again, the rounded and just slightly fat-leaning neck profile does feel superb in the hand, and the fact that this Les Plank weighs a mere 5.3lbs, despite being entirely solid, doesn't hurt the comfort thing either – although Stevens himself refuses to adhere to the 'less weight equals more tone' fallacy that so many players latch onto.

The aesthetic touches raise even a simple, otherwise workmanlike guitar such as this to the level of art

Then there are the aesthetic touches that raise even a simple, otherwise workmanlike guitar such as this to the level of art. Such as the subtly streaky ivoroid binding that's matched by the tuner buttons and hand-made ivoroid dog-ear pickup cover (try finding a block of the stuff big enough to do that yourself!), the exotically striped ebony headstock facing, the angle of the fingerboard at its body end, the tortoise pickguard, and the staggered mini-block position markers. It's easy to see why this guitar's new owner describes it first and foremost as 'inspiring.'

There are plenty of great pickup makers out there today winding excellent P-90s, but I've long held that this is one type of pickup that, in its newer guises, never seems to quite achieve that magical je ne sais quoi of the vintage article. Such was Fisher's thinking when he commissioned this guitar, and his selection of this particular P-90 from around 1956 was an excellent choice. It reads around 7.5k ohms on the meter–about the middle of the vintage-P-90 output range–but in the guitar it translates to so much more than mere specs could ever tell us. Plugged in, with amp set just beyond the edge of breakup, this guitar goes straight to that raw, snarling rock-lead territory where you'd expect a great Junior to take you, but does so with so much more articulation and sonic depth and buoyancy that it's really rather stunning. Wind down the volume control, though, and it cleans up steadily and beautifully, all the way down to two or three on the dial, without getting woolly and dull, staying rich and scrumptious all the way. Ultimately, if you could only have one guitar it would be hard to complain if this were the one.

KEY FEATURES

Michael Stevens Les Plank

- **PRICE:** From $6,000 ($7,200 as here; approx £4,635 and £5,562 respectively, plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY:** 1-piece korina
- **NECK:** 1-piece korina
- **FINGERBOARD:** Madagascar rosewood with ivoroid binding, 12" radius, 24.625" scale length
- **FRETS:** 22 medium nickel-silver
- **NUT:** Bone, 1.69"
- **PICKUPS:** Gibson 1956 P-90
- **ELECTRONICS:** Volume, tone
- **FINISH:** Vintage natural
- **HARDWARE:** Mojotone wraparound bridge, Sperzel tuners
- **CONTACT:** stevensguitars.com

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Wilko Johnson

The legendary Dr Feelgood guitarist tells *The Guitar Magazine* about the records that have inspired him

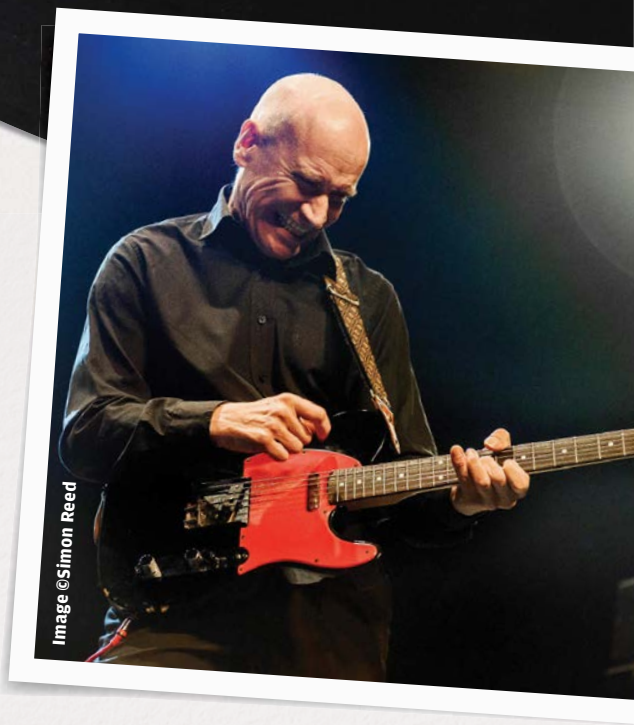


Image ©Simon Reed

As the bedrock of Dr Feelgood, Wilko Johnson's right hand became a hugely influential force for generations of rhythm guitarists who came after him, but it took nearly losing him for the Tele-toting Canvey Island boy to get the credit he deserved. In 2013 he was diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer and was given less than a year to live. Wilko embarked on a farewell tour and completed what he believed would be his final album. But he was premature – after undergoing 'radical' surgery in 2014, Wilko is remarkably now cancer-free, and will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Wilko Johnson Band at London's Royal Albert Hall on Tuesday 26 September. Tickets for this celebration of Wilko's career are available now from www.thegigcartel.com or by calling 0844 478 0898.

Sticky Fingers
THE ROLLING STONES

"*Sticky Fingers* is absolutely my favourite Rolling Stones album ever, I just think that Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Mick Taylor, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts were right at the top of their game when they were making it, and I just love it! There's not much else that I can say about that, really – it's great!"

St Dominic's Preview
VAN MORRISON

"I was sitting up one night listening to Radio Luxembourg – it used to just fade in and out! So I was listening to it, and the DJ said, 'This is the new Van Morrison album, I'm just going to play it without interruption.' And he did! By the time it was over I knew I had to run out and get it first thing the next morning!"

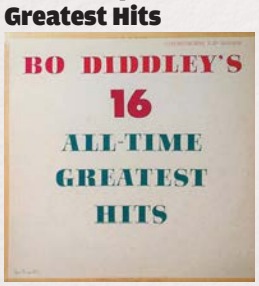
Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere
NEIL YOUNG

"I was a hippy in Kathmandu and there was this Dutch guy who had a portable cassette player – a rare thing in the late 60s! He had a few albums with him, and the batteries were running down, so it was always wowing. But he had this album and put it on. I love Neil Young – his guitar playing, his singing, and this album is full of great performances."

Mendocino
THE SIR DOUGLAS QUINTET

"I'm in New York one time, watching this music TV show, and there's these whacked out hippy cowboys on there – I thought, 'These guys are great! Who are they?' Then they played *She's About A Mover* and I was like 'Oh, it's The Sir Douglas Quintet!' When I got back to London, I saw this in a record store and I stayed up all night playing it over and over!"

Bo Diddley's 16 All-Time Greatest Hits
BO DIDDLEY

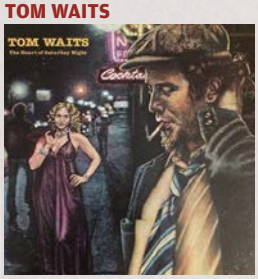


"For my 17th birthday, my missus gave me Bo Diddley's *16 All Time Greatest Hits* and I've still actually got this record – even though I don't have a turntable any more! It's a really thick vinyl and it plays really loud! It survived a thousand teenage parties and it's still going strong!"

Hard Again
MUDDY WATERS

"I'm over in the CBS convention in Atlanta, Georgia, and you have these banquets where people get up to play. I was over there with Lee Brilleaux and Dr Feelgood – we were their hot new thing, so I'm trying to keep my cool. But then Muddy Waters comes on with Johnny Winter's band and I just lost my cool and jumped up, and started waving my hands!"

The Heart Of Saturday Night
TOM WAITS



"Also on that TV show in New York was this character called Tom Waits. Now, this girl I knew had gone on her travels in America, and met this bloke called Tom Waits, and she kept going on and on about him. So when I saw him I thought, 'Oh it's that geezer!' But then he started playing *(Looking For) The Heart Of Saturday Night* and I was blown away!"

The Quintet Of The Hot Club Of France, Vol 2
DJANGO REINHARDT & STEPHANE GRAPELLI

"Django Reinhardt's *The Quintet Of The Hot Club Of France* was another record I got during my teenage years. He's such an inspired musician, and the two of them playing together it's just great. That's really weaved its way into my life."

Electric Ladyland
THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

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READER BOARDS

Finding himself in possession of a great guitar and amp, Nashville guitarist **CASEY ROBERTSON** set about putting together the ultimate board for the Music City's versatile scene...

KIT LIST

Casey Robertson

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  Pete Cornish LD-3
  Sonic Research Turbo Tuner ST-300
  ISP Decimator G-String
  Xotic Effects EP Booster
  Pete Cornish OC-1
  Real McCoy Custom RMC 10
  Mad Professor Tiny Orange Phaser
  Classic Amplification Classic Vibe CV-2
  Creepy Fingers Custom Fuzz
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  Strymon BigSky
- **PATCH CABLES**
  Evidence Audio SIS Monorails
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  Strymon Zuma, 2x Strymon Ojai
- **PEDALBOARD**
  Salvage Custom pedalboard – solid teak with a black lacquered tweed case finished with black leather end caps

What inspired this set-up?

"It started when I acquired a lovely 2010 Gibson Custom '55 Reissue Goldtop, then a superb hand-made tube amp from the folks at Savage Audio. I figured I had come this far, I could probably use some good pedals! It wasn't for a specific project, I just wanted to build the most versatile, high-quality board I could in a limited amount of space. I had already specified the dimensions for the board (26x16 inches) before I started picking out the pedals, it still amazes me how well it all came together, I have everything I need, and not a quarter of an inch to spare!"

Tell us about the journey...

"I started working on the board in 2012 and have made changes as recently as February! I switched a few things out that weren't getting used enough to justify the space occupied – I think that's really where your personal style comes into play (apparently I'm not a chorus guy). The board itself took a year to arrive! I love Daniel at Salvage Custom and he's a fantastic builder, but he had a huge back log of orders. It was worth the wait and that's saying a lot about Salvage's build quality."

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?

"Always! I think about switching certain things here and there but overall I am very happy with the sounds I'm getting. The Empress Echosystem and Reverb pedals are tempting but I am still very happy with my Strymon Timeline and BigSky. I love Pete Cornish's NG-3, it's a killer fuzz. I still debate whether or not the Origin Effects Cali 76 Compact Deluxe could replace my Pete Cornish OC-1... but the OC-1 is just so good. It's a great time to be a gear nerd for sure!"

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"My main guitar is the '55 Goldtop Reissue, it has one of the most comfortable, ergonomic necks I've played. My amp is a Savage Audio Glas 30. It's a hand-wired, EL84-loaded, 30-watt tank. It has a ton of clean headroom and I use my pedals for different gain stages. It has a 12-inch Celestion Alnico Gold speaker and a Siren 2 speaker cable from Evidence Audio."

What lessons have you learned putting this board together?

"Patience was the big one. I love working with small, independent builders, but it can be a long process from beginning to end. I've certainly learned a lot about the world of boutique equipment. It took a lot of time and hard earned money to bring my board to fruition. I will say however, when I'm sitting there playing and listening to the great tones coming out of that gear it can be so gratifying. It's all worth it when I get to turn that amp on and start playing, it's really that simple!"

The Guitar Magazine SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com**

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FENDER JOHN PAGE FOUNDERS DESIGN DOUBLE F-HOLE ESQUIRE £6,519
FOUNDERS KEEPERS

Founders Keepers

JOHN PAGE DOUBLE F-HOLE ESQUIRE

The second instrument in the Fender Custom Shop's 30th Anniversary salute to the original Master Builders that helped establish it sees John Page inject some air into the original solidbody design

John Page helped found Fender's Custom Shop alongside Michael Stevens, but his career at Fender had already included working side-by-side with one of the industry's most iconic figures – Stratocaster and 5D6 Bassman co-designer Freddie Tavares. Page joined Fender in 1978, where he was assigned to buff necks, but he soon climbed up the ranks. By 1980, at the age of just 23, he was working as a guitar designer in the R&D department, and it was then that Tavares took Page under his wing.

"Working with him was like having a front row seat at the formation of the electric guitar universe... and actually being swept in to be a part of it," recalls Page. "Freddie and I were extremely close, he was like a father to me. He mentored me in guitar design, but still treated me as an equal. He used to call me his 'third son', and treated me with the guidance and respect that goes with that. It was wonderful to hear his stories about his youth in Hawaii, his years playing in the Hollywood studios, and his early days designing with Leo Fender.

He even used to take me, and some of the other young guys, along with him to lunch with Leo and George Fullerton at the local Spires Restaurant. And he played guitar at his desk virtually every single day.

"When I started at Fender, he was one of a handful of original guys still around. But I thought of Freddie as the heart. He cared deeply for the people and the product, and was humble to a fault. I remember him telling me how on his first day working for Leo, he went into the shop, grabbed a piece of plywood, sanded it ultra-smooth, took it back in his office and drew two lines, 25.5 inches apart. They would become the nut and bridge of the Stratocaster. When I asked him about his input on the Strat, he'd just say 'Leo had to approve everything, every line, it was his design, period.' What a humble, lovely soul."

Above **The Esquire's neck is quartersawn medium roasted AAA flamed maple, giving a beautiful, earthy figure that provides an elegant contrast to the ebony 'board and tuner buttons**
Left **Page left Fender in 1998 and now runs John Page Guitars – the Founders Design Esquire uses some of John's own Woodtone ebony saddles, which give the guitar's voice a predictably woody depth when amplified**
Below **The double f-hole, thinline 'Page-o-caster' was conceived over 30 years ago, and it's entirely fitting that the man himself chose to revisit the concept for his Founders Design guitar**

Old & New

Like Stevens, Page chose the "blank canvas" of the Esquire for his Founders Design model, but its twin f-hole-sporting thinline body of roasted mahogany and a beautifully figured koa top (the latter a tribute to Tavares) add up to a guitar that's very different from Leo Fender's early design. Page's wonderfully light and resonant reimagining of the Esquire certainly achieves its stated aim of having a satisfying voice for home playing and writing before you even plug in, while the Custom Shop Handwound Original Blackguard Tele pickup and RSD Tele bridge with John Page Woodtone ebony saddles give it an engaging electric punch. The medium-roasted quartersawn AAA flame maple neck is a thing of beauty and features a lovely 10/56 'V' profile finished in gloss nitrocellulose.

There's a real luxury feel here, but Page's design has its roots back in the early days of the Custom Shop, albeit with a spruce top, in a model that became known as the 'Page-o-caster'. "I think the design was still forming in my head when Andre Duchossoir came to the shop to do research for one of his books," Page reveals. "When he and I talked about it, he said he wanted me to build him one, but I can't remember how much of the design evolved from our discussion. I would hate to say the original design was all my idea, and therefore slight my friend. Andre is definitely the one who dubbed it the Page-o-caster.

"I wanted to make Spruce topped, acoustic-ish, Tele-based guitar, that I could hear and feel unplugged. I wanted it to be very clean and simple. It started with the double f-hole Esquire, and eventually I took it to the next level with the Telecoustic Custom. We only made a handful of the double f-hole Esquires back then, I have no idea of actual numbers. When I left Fender in November 1998, the guys in the shop made me a beautiful version of it with a spruce top, flamed maple body and neck, and my name inlayed in abalone... it was gorgeous!"

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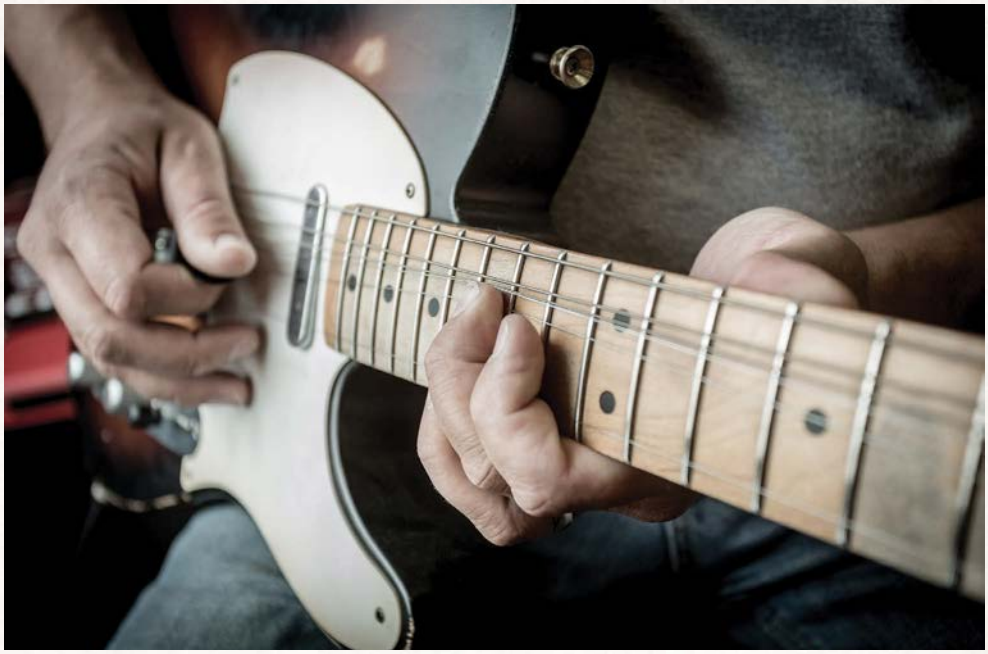
QUIET IS THE NEW LOUD

We all play at home, but most of us can't do so with our amps cranked – here are 40 ways to keep it down and still sound great

Words **Richard Purvis**

Sleeping children, grumpy flatmates, wall-thumping neighbours, easily traumatised cats... there are plenty of reasons why the modern home is no place for cranking a 100-watt stack. Luckily, these days there are also plenty of reasons why you don't have to. Whether you're rehearsing, recording or jamming along to daytime TV theme tunes in front of the telly, we've selected the best ways for you to keep it down without sacrificing inspirational tone...

PART ONE: TAMING A BIG AMP

Maybe there's only room for one amplifier in your life, and it has to be loud enough for gigs. Here's how you can you miniaturize that massive tone for the home...

ATTENUATORS AND DUMMY LOADS

This whole feature could have been five words long – 'Turn down the master volume' – but for two reasons. One, many of our favourite amps don't have a master volume; and two, MV amps often sound a bit flat when they're backed off, because the signal is being squished down before those big power valves can get stuck into it. This is why the gods were kind enough to bless us with attenuators, which sit between an amplifier's output stage and its speaker(s).

Some of them can be switched to zero, so that no sound gets through at all. This is ideal if you're a really, really bad guitarist... but it also has a more serious use for recording. In this mode an attenuator is working as a dummy load, protecting your amp's output transformer (valve amps always need to be plugged into something) while allowing you to take a line-level DI signal to your audio interface.

Resistive attenuators simply convert sound into heat, while reactive ones are designed to preserve a speaker's varying impedance at different frequencies for a truer response. However, they'll all change the character of your tone slightly – apart from anything else, speakers don't sound the same when they're not being pushed so hard.

1 Tone King Ironman II Mini
£395, toneking.com

The Ironman is fitted as standard to all Tone King amplifiers, and the Mini version – suitable for any amp up to 30 watts with an eight-ohm output – is also available as a standalone unit. This is a reactive load, and here's the really clever bit: in addition to a six-step attenuation control, it has a 'solo' footswitch so you can bump things back up again for your 'Ladies and gentlemen, on lead guitar...' moment.

2 Weber Mass
$260, tedweber.com

Here's a reactive attenuator that wears a cunning disguise so as not to disrupt the complex relationship between amp and speaker. The Mass uses the moving parts of an actual speaker to make your amp think it's talking directly to the real thing, not just a go-between. It has switchable impedance and treble boost, and can be turned down to complete silence for using only the line output.

3 Jet City Jettenuator
£115, jetcityamplification.com

We're taking a drop in price here, but the words 'designed by Mike Soldano' should reassure you that this isn't going to be junk. The Jettenuator is basic in the sense that it's built around an L-pad, a simple resistor-based device, but it's cleverly thought out. There are three inputs – four, eight and 16 ohms – but only one speaker output, and that doesn't care what impedance it comes up against. It also has an XLR output with mic simulation and a standard line out.

When you're playing guitar at home you want to sound like you're flapping your trousers without getting complaints

4 Fryette Power Station 2
£699, fryette.com

The Fryette is a 6L6-powered 50-watt power amp in its own right. So yes, if you were wondering why this unit is so much more expensive than the others listed here, that's why. It's first of all a reactive attenuator and dummy load, but the re-amping feature means it can also – somewhat contrary to the whole point of this article it must be said – turn a quiet amp into a loud one!

5 Bad Cat Unleash V2
£519, badcatamps.com

This switchable-impedance attenuator and load box is another that also does re-amping, courtesy of a 100-watt solid-state power stage. We're not in love with its sound when used as a simple level-dropper, but its more satisfying amp-boosting skills make it a potentially useful multi-tool.

6 Elevenator
£40 approx, bit.ly/diyattenuator

Resent the idea of handing over money to a stranger in order to clamp down on your sonic fun? Then why not do your own clamping instead! Designed by our own Huw Price for a workshop feature in the world's greatest guitar magazine – whaddaya mean, which one? – this simple but effective DIY box uses an L-pad and includes a three-way treble switch to keep things sparkly. Just follow the link above for assembly instructions.

7 Mesa/Boogie CabClone
£239, mesaboogie.com

Boogie's little box has a 'thru' output for a speaker cabinet, but it really exists to let you leave the big old thing at home. It's a dummy load and cab simulator, for plugging your amp head directly into a recording interface or PA. There's no switchable impedance, so you'll need to pick the right version to match your rig, but you do get three flavours of simulation – open-back, closed-back and 'vintage' – plus a headphone output for silent 3am wig-outs.

8 Eminence Reignmaker & Maverick
£123, eminence.com

The secret of the speakers with a big dial on the back is a technology called 'flux density modulation', which doesn't facilitate time travel but does change the strength of the magnetic field acting on the cone. So you're actually making the speaker less powerful, rather than feeding it with a weaker signal. The snag? There are only two models to choose from, and if neither of them has the sound you're after, you're stuffed.

SPEAKER CAB IMPULSE RESPONSES

So you've succeeded in quietening your big amp down, or silencing it completely, but now you want that full-scale mic'd cab sound for recording. Software to the rescue!

9 Redwirez
from £free, redwirez.com

Rather than just using EQ filtering to make a DI signal sound more realistic, an impulse response (IR) samples the sonic 'fingerprint' of a real cabinet recorded in a real room. This can then be downloaded as a plug-in for your DAW. We're directing you straight to Redwirez here for the simple reason that it offers an irresistible way to try out the IR concept: a free download of a Marshall 1960A with 17 mics (in assorted positions) to choose from. We tried it, and the results were refreshingly spacious and lifelike.

Attenuators can help your favourite amps perform in a living room environment

10 Celestion Digital Download
from £free, celestionplus.com

As the world's most famous manufacturer of guitar speakers, you might expect Celestion to be bubbling over with rage at the advent of IRs – but it's responded by making a bunch of its own. All the big names are available, including the Greenback and the Blue, and there's one free download using a single Vintage 30 in a closed-back cab. We tried this one too, and found it scarily convincing.

ONE-BOX SOLUTIONS

11 Two Notes Torpedo Reload
£599, two-notes.com

Two Notes is a French firm based so close to the sunny Mediterranean it's a wonder their staff ever bother to do any work at all – but we're glad they do. The Torpedo Reload crams a fair chunk of the company's all-round cleverness into one handy unit: it's a reactive attenuator and load box with switchable impedance that also offers access to a whole bunch of impulse responses via the Torpedo WoS III plug-in.

POWER SCALING AMPS

There's a trend for amp makers to offer power scaling as a less tone-sucky alternative to a master volume. This involves reducing the voltage applied to the output stage, which in turn reduces the wattage you'll get coming out of it. Put in fewer eggs, and you get a smaller omelette – simple, really.

12 Morgan AC20
£1,449, morganamps.com

Has any other modern maker nailed the distinctive chiming crunch of a vintage Vox as well as Morgan? The AC20 is a simple amp, as most of the best ones are, with just three knobs – and one of those is for power scaling. It doesn't actually get much

quieter until you've pulled it back shy of halfway, but the AC20 never stops sounding beautifully Voxy.

13 Suhr Badger 30
£2,069, suhr.com
Maybe the word 'badger' doesn't sound as silly in America as it does over here... anyway, Suhr is a deadly serious maker of guitars, pedals and amps, and its Badger models are British-voiced, cathode-biased heads with a footswitchable MOSFET boost. The power control on this EL34-fired 30-watter can take you down to a single watt, and works in conjunction with a drive knob that serves as an old-fashioned master volume. Play with them both and judge the difference for yourself.

14 Milkman Sound 5W Half Pint
£2,199, milkmansound.com
Yes, this one's only five watts to begin with, but how many watts do you think it takes to wake up a grumpy spouse in the next room? From bitter experience, somewhat less than five. So this American boutique gem has a power-scaling control on the back panel that lets you dial it right down to a fraction of a watt. It's a Fender Vibro-Champ type with a single 6V6 and a 12-inch Jupiter speaker.

SWITCHABLE POWER VALVES

Let's not forget the output tubes themselves. With some amps that have four, it's possible to simply take two of them out – but please don't try this unless you really know what you're doing, as it's easily done wrong.

There are neater solutions. Some amps, such as Swart's AST models, allow you to use 6V6 or 6L6 power valves and swap rectifier valve types for earlier break-up and compression, while Rivera, Vox and Gibson have used pentode/triode switching. Here's one ingenious approach that takes something from both of those ideas – and another that lets you completely rebuild you output stage on the fly...

15 TAD Class A Converters
£75/pair, tubeampdoctor.com
This is a simple trick if there's room inside your amp for some extra-tall valves. Replace your EL34s or 6L6s with a pair of these drop-in converters (aka ToneBones) and you'll be effectively turning your 30-watter into an EL84-fired AC15 type. Just check the TAD site for amp compatibility, and make sure you choose the triode version for maximum attenuation – down to around eight watts.

16 Hughes & Kettner Triamp Mark III
£3,289, hughes-and-kettner.com
H&K's flagship amp has a resistive attenuation control on the back panel, but much more interesting is theway it lets you hop between three different pairs of power valves just by pressing buttons on the mission control-style front panel. So you could use four KT88s for your big festival appearance, then switch over to a pair of 6L6s for home practice. Expensive? Oh, er... we hadn't noticed...

'If they can physically fit inside your amp, drop-in converters can let you replace big bottles with tubes to give you more grit at the lower reaches of your volume dial

PORTABLE POWER

For a leftfield option how about a valve amp that fits under your hat?

17 Zvex Nano Head
£529, zvex.com
It's no secret that titchy tube amps such as the legendary tweed Fender Champ can record beautifully, but there's no need to stop there. ZVex's Nano Head is just 4.5 inches across and pumps out half a watt of pure valve power into the smallest cab you can find (well, it'd look pretty silly on a 4x12). See also the Blackstar HT-1 and Marshall's one-watt 50th anniversary models.

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PART TWO: STOMP OUT YOUR PROBLEMS

Whether it's plugged into your usual amp or going directly to an audio interface, the short cut to tinnitus-free tone might be at your feet...

STANDARD PEDALS

You wouldn't buy a conventional stompbox to make your amp quieter, any more than you'd hire a drummer to make your band more intelligent. Or would you? In some cases, shrewd use of one or two pedalboard staples can help you get the sounds you want at lower levels.

18 Caroline Haymaker

£199, carolineguitar.com

How do you crunch up the perfect clean sound? The simple answer is to crank up the preamp volume... but that little nudge into the breakup zone is often just enough to turn a gentle jam into a visit from the noise police. A transparent overdrive – that is, one that's been voiced not to colour your basic tone – is the obvious answer. The Haymaker is an excellent example of the type, allowing you to dial in just as much pure gain as you need without hitting the front end of your amp any harder than you want to.

19 Earthquaker Devices Palisades

£245, earthquakerdevices.com

The combination of slimmed-down bottom end and boosted upper mids means a Tube Screamer-type will give you a more 'compact' overdriven tone, with lots of cut but very little low-end bloom. So if floorboard-wobbling bass is your biggest problem, a Screamer could be your saviour. The Palisades offers several flavours of amp-like drive – and a unique amount of control over those deadly bass frequencies.

20 Orange Kongpressor

£119, orangeamps.com

Compressors can be handy for making things sound louder than they rare – which is good news if you're actively looking to annoy people – but they can also restore a bit of life to an amp that you've had to turn down below its sweet spot. The Kongpressor is particularly good for this: as well as compressing in a natural way, it has a 'chime' control that's perfect for adding sparkly treble to an unhappily flattened clean tone. It's reviewed on p91.

The EarthQuaker Palisades is a Tube Screamer-type overdrive that will also let you control bass frequencies to stop the floorboards rumbling as much

PREAMP & AMP-IN-A-BOX PEDALS

Now we move on to specialist stompboxes that are designed to replace your rowdy old amplifier altogether... or at least the front half of it. For silent recording with amp-like tone, send the output straight to an audio interface; and when you are allowed to make a wee bit of noise, plug into your amp's effects return or a standalone power amp.

21 Tech 21 Character Series

£219, tech21nyc.com

Tech 21 has been making amp-emulating stompers since 1989, when 'digital' just meant a watch without hands. Its current range of Character pedals covers every major amp type from both sides of the Atlantic, and each has a switchable speaker sim. Look out also for the Fly Rig 5 models, which combine the same analogue amp emulations with overdrive, reverb and delay.

22 Kingsley Constable

$375, kingsleyamplifiers.com

This is basically the preamp section of an old Marshall Plexi in a box that lives on the floor. It has two channels, one bright and one deep, that can be blended together just as you would with a real Plexi – and it's a hand-wired circuit using a pair of 12AX7 valves. You can also flick a switch on the pedal to drop its output to normal stompbox level, turning this into a very high-class boost and low-gain overdrive.

23 Mooer Preamps

£94.99, mooeraudio.co.uk

Mooer makes affordable mini pedals that are often cheekily 'inspired by' famous designs – and, just in time to make this list, it recently launched a series of preamps. The prize for least subtle name in the range goes to the Two Stone, a tribute (if we really have to spell it out) to Two-Rock. Like the other models it has two channels, three-band EQ and switchable cab simulation.

24 DigiTech CabDryVR

£129, digitech.com

Now this one's a bit of an oddity, in that it simulates cabs but not amps – so it's best used after a preamp (see above). You can then run the CabDryVR straight into a recording interface or mixer, and choose from its 14 tweakable impulse responses.

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PART THREE: GO DIGITAL

Right, so you've lobbed your 1957 Fender Deluxe into a skip and decided to dive into valve-free amplification. Here are the best places for you to start...

LIFESTYLE AMPS

Sorry, we couldn't think of a less yucky name than 'lifestyle'. These are digital practice amps designed to be versatile, portable and effective at home-friendly levels. They all have modern connectivity, built-in effects and headphone outputs – so the only thing likely to bother the rest of the household will be your embarrassing facial expressions.

25 Yamaha THR10 v2

£224, uk.yamaha.com

With its retro-radio looks, the diddy THR10 is in no danger of overpowering your next stadium crowd. But as a practice combo that'll fit comfortably on a bookshelf, it's a very tempting package. It offers a range of usable sounds, with an impressively wide stereo image and plenty of onboard effects to play with. There's also a companion phone app for tweaking your tones.

26 Line 6 AMPLIFi 30

£209, line6.com

The AMPLIFi 30 is such a discreet little black box you could almost mistake it for a Bluetooth speaker. Then again, it *is* a Bluetooth speaker. This lunchbox combo's wireless smarts mean you can use it for home practice, DI recording via USB, listening to mp3s from your phone... or any combination of the above. You can even ask the app to dial in a sound to match the tones of the track you're playing along to.

27 Fender Mustang GT 40

£195, fender.com

The new Mustang GT range includes a tasty 100-watter with a 12-inch Celestion speaker (£325), but this dinkier version – 40 watts through a pair of 6.5-inchers – is all you need for bedroom use. You get lots of presets controlled via the LCD screen or app, there's a built-in looper, and it can download new sounds and firmware updates directly via wifi.

28 Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

£229, blackstaramps.com

Even the coffee machine at Blackstar's offices probably has an ISF control – this patented US/UK character-shaping dial has become the company's signature dish, and it's just as effective on teeny amps like this as it is on the all-valve Artist and HT models. The ID:Core BEAM also offers Bluetooth streaming and has some cool stereo reverbs on board.

GO VIRTUAL

If you're tech-savvy there are some wondrous apps that can turn your PC/Mac, tablet or smartphone into not just an amp but a whole collection of emulated classics, complete with effects. They'll work as plug-ins for any major DAW.

First, though, we need to talk about hardware. For desktop recording you'll need a low-latency USB interface with a guitar-friendly input – there are billions of the things, but a solid starting point would be the Focusrite Scarlett Solo (£95, focusrite.com). Looking to jam through a phone or tablet? Your options for iOS devices include the Apogee JAM (£99, apogeedigital.com), while Android users can now join in the fun with the iRig 2 (£35, ikmultimedia.com).

29 Native Instruments Guitar Rig 5 Pro

£169, native-instruments.com

Why are you running away? Ah, because Native Instruments is best known for making soft synths and samplers? Don't worry – this desktop amp emulator is for guitarists only. You get 17 amps, 27 cabs, 54 effects and 16 microphones to choose from – and if you don't fancy messing about with all that, you can just scroll through the 400 presets.

30 IK Multimedia AmpliTube

from €16.99, ikmultimedia.com

The software section of IK's website has over 40 downloads for your Mac or PC, and the separate apps page

Fender's new Mustang range offers loads of sounds and control via smartphone app

has almost as many for your iPhone or iPad. So allow us to rescue your pinwheeling brain and focus on the basics: for desktop, AmpliTube 4 (€179.99) covers all the key bases and includes a multi-microphone 'cab room'; and for mobile, you'll probably want to start with the core AmpliTube app (€21.99).

31 Positive Grid Bias Amp
from €59, positivegrid.com
We recently reviewed Positive Grid's 600-watt hardware amp, the Bias Head, and were especially impressed by its wide range of convincing rock and metal tones. That's certainly an option for giggable power and silent playing in one box, but you can have access to all the same sounds via Positive Grid's desktop and iOS app.

32 Peavey ReValver 4
$99.99, peavey.com
Plenty of virtual amps are letting you get into deep editing these days, but ReValver was the one that introduced us to the joys of tampering with everything from speakers and effects to rectifier valves, output transformers and coupling capacitor frequencies. And you don't have to actually understand any of it!

33 Apple Amp Designer
£free, apple.com
This is the free package that comes with Logic and GarageBand – but while it's pretty great, the wider point here is that you shouldn't overlook the built-in amps of whatever DAW you use, even if you're just noodling rather than recording. Amp Designer offers plenty of fine control over your tone, and the virtual stompboxes are a lot of fun, too.

HIGH-END MODELLERS

The main reason for using a modelling device instead of a real valve amp has nothing to do with loudness – it's all about flexibility. Why settle for a single amp when you can have dozens of 'em in one box, with effects included? The obvious benefit for the purposes of this feature, though, is that you can enjoy all those sounds without having to disturb the dust on any real speakers. And, of course, they're a lot more giggable than software amps.

Going digital is one of the best ways to get great tones at neighbour-friendly volume levels

34 Kemper Profiler Head
€1,705, kemper-amps.com
The headline feature with the Kemper is profiling – you can use it to capture and emulate the sonic profile of any amp it hears – and the results are convincing enough for the likes of Muse's Matt Bellamy and Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil, both of whom have used Kempers live. It has hundreds of tones already installed, there are thousands more online, and if you want to play through a real cab, there's a 600-watt powered version (€2,110).

35 Fractal Axe-Fx II XL+
€2,699, fractalaudio.com
Fractal describes this rackmount unit as 'the world's most powerful all-in-one guitar processor' and for this price you'd hope so! You're paying for ultra-beefy digital processing as well as flexible connectivity options, Kemper-style 'tone matching' and over 180 amp plus 150 speaker sims and effects.

36 Line 6 Helix LT
£852, line6.com
The LT should stand for Lovely & Tidy, because this stripped-down version of the Helix is a neat piece of kit. It has the same formidable processing tech, but with more basic connectivity and a more tempting price. Key features include 62 amps, 104 effects, a big LCD screen, and component editing.

PART THREE: THE BEST OF THE REST

Finally, some 'lateral thinking' options that don't fit into any of the other categories but could prove just as useful in your quest for a bit of hush...

MAKE YOUR GUITAR QUIETER

37 Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar
£488, uk.yamaha.com

If your pet capybara's just nodded off in the next room, even going unplugged might not be quiet enough. Here's Yamaha's answer. Acoustically its lack of a resonant body keeps things (almost) silent, while the SLG200S emulates a normal acoustic through its line out and headphone sockets.

38 The treble bleed mod
£4.32, axesrus.co.uk

Simply turning down your guitar's volume control is the quickest (and crudest) fix of all, but it can make your tone duller as well, for reasons to do with potentiometer resistance. There are loads of kits available for getting around this, and all they involve is one capacitor and one resistor to solder across the volume pot.

MAKE THE ROOM QUIETER

39 Randall ISO 12
€479, randallamplifiers.com

So we move from the very beginning of the signal chain – the guitar – to the very end. There are plenty of isolation cabs on the market, including this popular model from Randall, or, DIY skills permitting, you could always knock one up yourself out of wood and acoustic foam. It's got to be more effective than building a frame of old mic stands around your amp and covering it in stinky duvets.

40 Acoustic absorption foam
from £14/panel, auralex.com

Those bumpy panels on studio walls are designed for the people inside, not their neighbours – they absorb reflections to make a room less echoey. But less noise swirling around means less noise to bother anyone else, doesn't it? If that's not enough, Auralex also sells sound insulation materials for walls, ceilings and floors.

CRIES, CONTOURS, LOUDNESS WARS

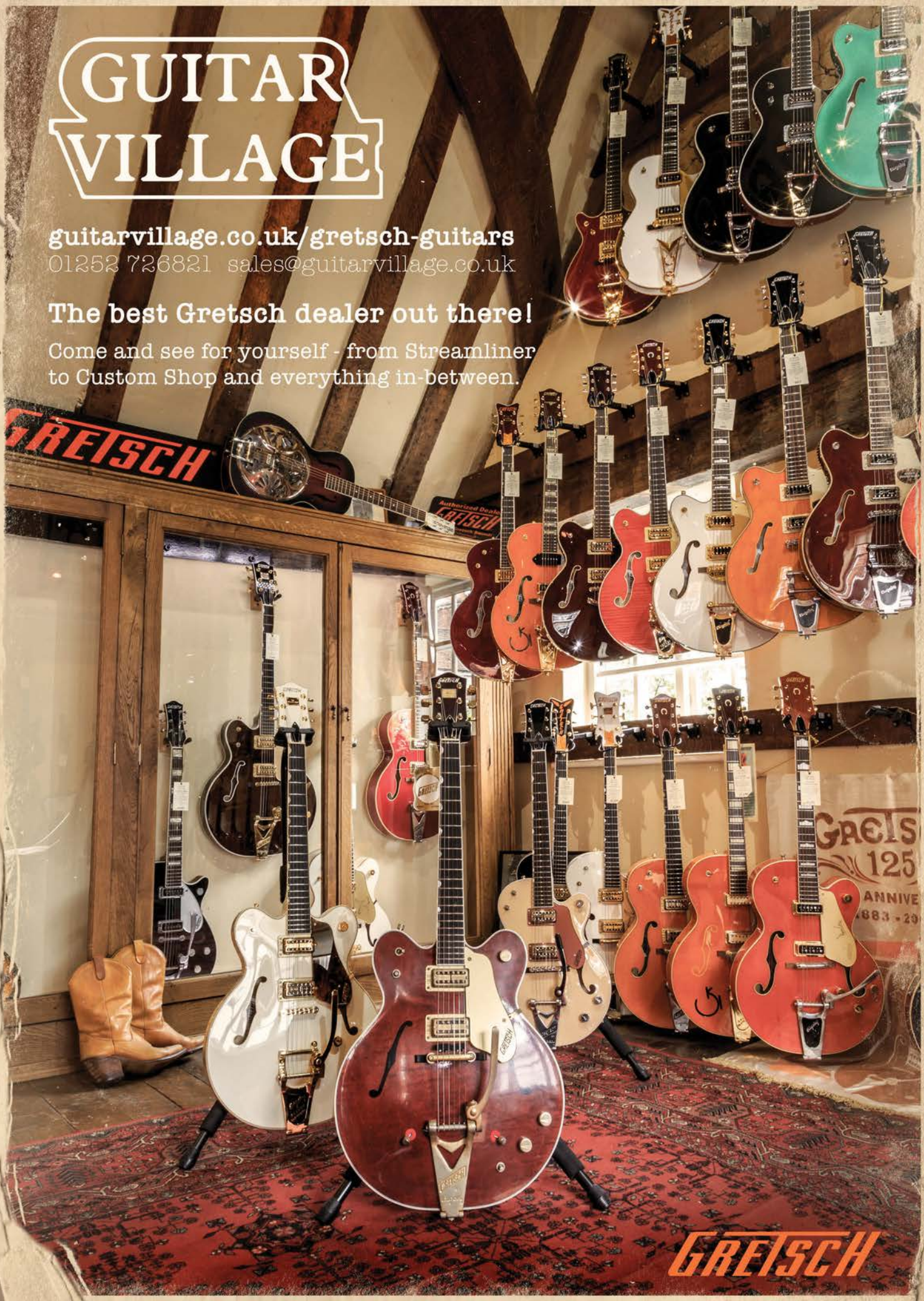
WHY IT'S SO HARD TO MAKE QUIET GUITARS SOUND GOOD

Rock 'n' roll was born loud – and, unfortunately for those of us who aren't making music in a sound-proofed underground lair, that remains the secret of its power to thrill and excite us. Part of this is because we naturally associate louder sounds with danger and excitement, and because it's easier to be emotionally swept up in something that drowns out all other ambient sounds. This is the instinct behind the 'loudness wars' that have led to a lot of modern day music being so aggressively compressed.

And here's an extra complication: equal loudness contours, aka Fletcher-Munson curves. These chart the way we hear different frequencies at different levels – specifically, we're generally really good at hearing quiet sounds in the 2-5kHz range. Those are the key frequencies for understanding speech, and are about bang-on for crying babies, too, so this tuned sensitivity may well be an evolutionary function.

But what does all this mean for guitarists? Well, if you take a signal and reduce it evenly across the spectrum, it won't sound the same – the frequencies outside that range will appear to drop more dramatically to our ears. This is why attenuated sounds often benefit from a compensating boost in the lower and upper registers – that's science!

A treble bleed mod preserves high-end when you roll back the volume control on your guitar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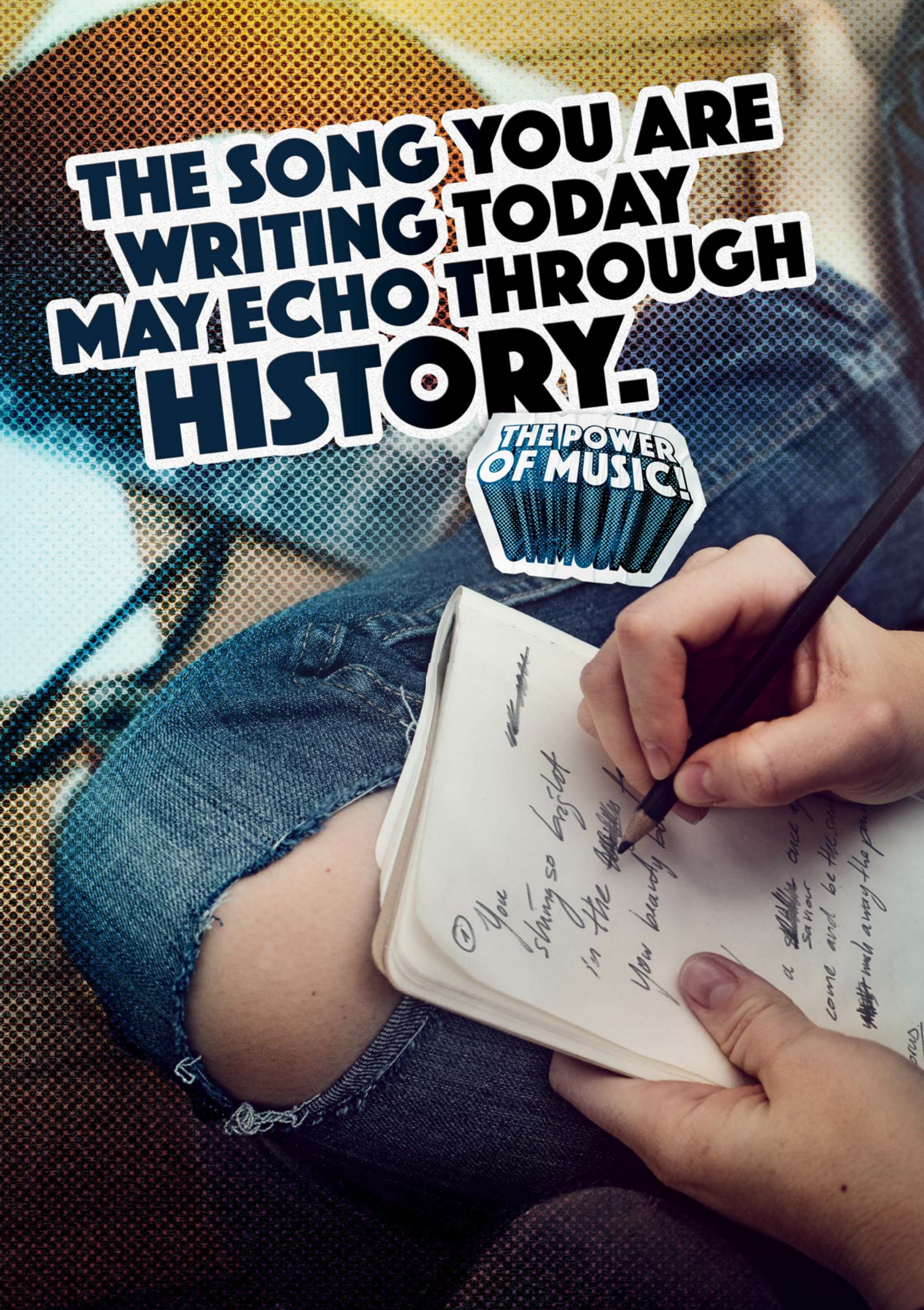
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THE POWER OF MUSIC!

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

As Vintage Trouble roll into Bristol, Chris Vinnicombe meets the band's resident tonehound, Nalle Colt, and discovers that there's more rhythm than blues in their sharp-dressed new sounds

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Vintage Trouble's high-energy rhythm and blues live show has drawn rapturous applause in some of the world's biggest concert venues thanks to support slots with rock royalty such as The Who and AC/DC. Frontman Ty Taylor could sing the phonebook and make it sound good, but even though Vintage Trouble have seemed poised for superstardom for several years now, the band's much-admired guitarist Nalle Colt admits they "still have a hard time actually getting our records played and getting airplay and getting regular mainstream people to hear it."

In late April, with newly recruited keyboard player Brian London in tow, Malmö-born Colt and his fellow adoptive Angelenos decided to get away from it all and decamped to the Caribbean to work on new music with eclectic pop producer Jeeve, aka Jean-Yves Ducornet.

"Our manager spotted a place in the Cayman Islands," Colt recalls. "We're on the road so much, so for us to find 10 days to actually go to a studio and do it... I think we needed time to be alone by ourselves and maybe reconnect. If we record in LA all our friends come down and hang out and everyone has opinions about the recordings. We have Brian with us now. We just hired him but we wanted to bring him in on the recordings. We definitely wanted to take it in a little bit of a different direction this time. We reached a limit."

Ask Jeeve

Although 2015's long player, *1 Hopeful Rd*, was well-received by fans, the band hit a glass ceiling when it came to wider appeal and exposure. Initial discussions about working with outside writers were met with resistance: "We talked to radio and they were looking for something else, sound-wise," remembers Colt. "At the time we got a little bit insecure and we got scared. What do you mean? We can't write our own songs? So suddenly with our management we were talking about finding a producer, working with songwriters and at the beginning we were like, 'What the fuck are you talking about? We're not doing that shit!'"

Lead singer Taylor ended up working on new material with several producers away from the rest of the band. Of those collaborators it was Jeeve – described by Colt as, "a great musician, great drummer, great guitarist" with "a great sense of music" – whom the band chose to work with after he and Taylor penned the appropriately-titled *Battle's End*. "It's a beautiful song," says Nalle. "Ty told us a lot about him and his situation. We ended up meeting and we all liked him and we

Colt's Gretsch Duo Jet was built by Stephen Stern and his team in the Gretsch Custom Shop. The guitar has an aged white finish and comes loaded with a set of Monty's PAF pickups in Filter'Tron covers. The Vintage Trouble logo features on the medallion that is situated between the tailpiece and bridge

just took a chance. If it didn't all work out then at least we all hang out in a cool house in the Cayman Islands for 10 days!"

Although some of the photos posted on the band's social media pages might have been mistaken for holiday snaps, Colt reveals that the band worked hard and took the opportunity to try new approaches: "For us it was important this time to work with a pop producer. Someone who has a little more modern edge. I come from blues music, blues guitar, everything I do comes from that energy, and all the records we've done before, we always did it live, all of us together, even Ty singing. We'd just pick takes and that's it.

"We talked to the producer and had a meeting and he was like, if we're going to do something that really pops on the radio, I think you need to approach it differently. Kids are used to a different energy now. I probably was one of the ones who had to struggle the most, in a way in the beginning I was almost angry, 'cause I felt like we were betraying what we are doing, y'know? I love rock bands and I love the straight-up thing, but for us it was also like, how do you stay alive as a band and keep reaching more people?

"I love our old records, they are great, I'm so proud of them, but we wanted to try something different. And this was quite different, we did it separately and I laid guitars down by myself and it's a lot more orchestrated this time. There was a little less room for improvising and stuff like that. We wanted to concentrate on really bringing out the tracks and the power of it. It's good, but it's different."

> "I've never really been in that digital world. I almost had to fight myself"

Marooned Five

The sessions in the Cayman Islands weren't simply about a mindset shift: the geography of the situation meant that Colt was limited when it came to the amount of gear that he could call on. "I'm an amp fanatic... I love all that stuff. But we flew to the Cayman Islands and they were like, you can't bring anything! You can bring like, two guitars and a fuzz pedal. They had some stuff that was just basically a Marshall and an AC30 that I ended up using. I even used some plugins and went straight into a computer.

"It was interesting for me because I've never really been in that world. It was quite challenging, I almost had to fight myself and go against what I always thought was the real

Colt's Gibson Custom Les Paul (above) and Fender Custom Shop Relic Telecaster (opposite) feature heavily on the band's new material; they were the only guitars he was able to take along to sessions in the Cayman Islands. The Les Paul features Crazyparts 1959er PAF replica pickups, which gives Nalle the versatility he requires

thing. We wanted to stay away from the blues aspect a little more, there's a lot more rhythm guitars. It was fun because it was turning everything around and going the opposite way. And I'm proud... the songs sound incredible. It's got a lot of great grooves – Richard [Danielson], our drummer, really came through and did some amazing stuff."

At least being stranded on an island with only two guitars and two amps didn't leave much room for option paralysis, which Colt feels was a problem in previous sessions: "I think that was one of the main issues on the last album. We were in LA, I was so happy, I was like, 'I'm bringing everything I have!' There was like, all these fucking amplifiers and guitars, and I just couldn't settle on anything. We spent hours and hours... it's funny with guitar players. We sit and listen to the sound on its own and you go, 'Oh my god...' and once it's settled into the track it's very different.

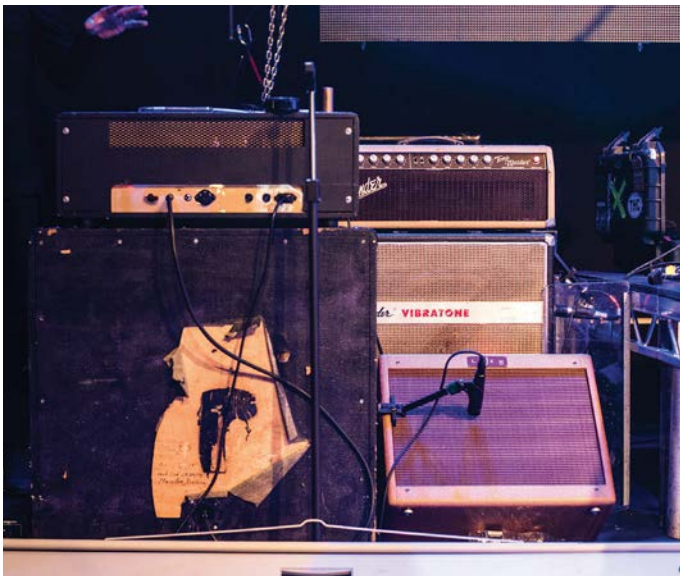
"I learned a lot from making this record as far as doing my own recordings at home, EQing guitars and finding a place for it in music. It's been a great learning thing for me. And I don't know if I'll maybe disappoint a lot of blues guitarists because there's not going to be very much of that. It's about taking Vintage Trouble and throwing ourselves into a modern world that still contains what we do, but if the first thing I think of is doing that, let's do the opposite."

> "I don't want to get stuck... we never had intentions of being a retro band"

Right-Hand Man

Though Nalle says his approach to music has "always been kind of loose," preferring to "just go for it," working with Jeeve resulted in a more disciplined approach to arrangements. "I've always been kind of a free-flowing guy, I follow the melodies and answer the melodies. He wanted to separate our instruments and there were a lot of cool rhythm things I never would have thought of. It was really fun to work with him on building guitar parts that could really make something orchestrated."

We wonder if the result is more of a right-hand record than a left-hand record in guitar terms. "Yeah, definitely. I think so," Colt agrees, even if there was still some room to cut loose. "We would usually do all the guitars then I was ask him to put the track on and just noodle over the whole track, like



A Boss ES-8 effects switching system helps Nalle keep his new pedalboard in check. Although he used the house Vox and Marshall and plug-ins during the band's recent studio stint, on the road his set-up still features his trusty Lazy J 20 combo along with a vintage Fender Vibratone cab driven by a Fender Tone-Master head and a 50-watt Plexi clone that has to point off-stage to keep the on stage volume levels manageable

find my way. That was cool, we ended up leaving a lot of cool little things that ended up coming from that. But it's more of a right-hand record."

That's if it ends up being a 'record' at all in the conventional sense. It's ironic that the relentless march of modernity has birthed a 1950s-style singles culture in which two minutes of lightning in a bottle has much more impact than the release of a full album.

> "It seems more important right now to release tracks rather than a full album"

"We got eight or nine songs done in Cayman Islands," reveals Colt, "but we've got some new tracks that we want to get down so we might just fly straight back. We might not do a full album right away. It seems more important right now to just release tracks. It's a different time and if you want to stay current... it's more fun to release a song every now and then. It gets attention. It's taken a full spin. People are streaming a lot of music and it's more fun to constantly have something fresh going on. We might just do that.

"I've been wanting to do this for a long time. We met with our manager probably six years ago and I told him we wanted

LIFE WITH BRIAN

After years of bringing their live set into the recording studio, Vintage Trouble now find themselves taking studio arrangements stripping them down for the road. Nalle's live rig is built to solve these problems...

"When you end up layering guitars in the studio and doing different things, you go, what am I going to do live? What is the main part?" says Colt. "There might be two guitars that really need each other. It's great now to have Brian on keyboards. I got a bigger pedalboard, Roland/Boss really helped me out, we got this kind of MIDI switcher so with delays I could get specific timings in place per song. On the recordings I used a lot of filtered echoes and stuff like that and now I'm trying to take it live. It's a trip!"

With a Lazy J 20, 50-watt Plexi clone and a Fender Tone-Master driving a vintage Vibratone rotating speaker cabinet, Colt still gets most of his tones the old-fashioned way: "I ride the volume control a lot, that's my whole thing. Since we started this band I've liked to get kind of a gritty amp and then just turn down to get it to clean up. It just feels and sounds natural.

"[For rhythm] I'm usually set about five and a half or six on a Les Paul, in the middle position. Then you can just turn down the bass pickup a little bit – it's amazing. The stuff you can do with a Les Paul is incredible, there's a thousand sounds in it. You've got to fight the adrenaline as usually you get onstage and end up just flipping it to the bridge pickup, but you've gotta train yourself! For me it came from watching Jimmy Page, he was the master of that."

"I recommend for any Les Paul guy, or any guitarist, keep swapping pickups and find your thing. It takes a little bit of time and a lot of trial and error, but it's fun. It's almost impossible to do all that dynamic stuff when there's too much output. When you get into lower output pickups you can get that clarity..."

Seymour Duncan

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Vintage Trouble tearing the roof off Bristol's SWX venue in May 2017. Led by frontman Ty Taylor, they put on one hell of a show. Visit vintagetrouble.com for forthcoming dates

to do this, but he comes from the old school. But I'm glad we're here and doing what we're doing. We'll try it. It might not be the right way, who knows? We're just like any other band. You've just got to throw yourself out there and do your best, and hope that people dig it."

Vintage Trouble aren't a band who are afraid of broadening their horizons. Along with the kind of work ethic that sees them use soundchecks to hone new material and record every live performance for post-match analysis on the tour bus, their willingness to look to the pop mainstream for inspiration as readily as the classic rock 'n' roll music they grew up with is to be applauded. Even if it does mean listening to boyband star Harry Styles' solo album.

"There's fantastic guitars on it!" claims Nalle. "I couldn't believe it. I recommend it to guitar players. It's funny because in Los Angeles I have friends who are architects, for instance, and it's fun to talk to them because it's the same for them. They get stuck on a way of designing houses but then they just go on vacation – looking at huts in Thailand or something – and get this great idea and do something completely different.

"For me, I want to be that person. I don't want to get stuck and end up being the old grumpy guy who just has to do it this way and ends up being boring. Our name is Vintage Trouble and we almost got known as being a retro band. We never had any intentions of being a retro band, our inspiration came from 50s rock 'n' roll music but we were never like, we have to be retro. For me it's like, get inspiration and do music, wherever it takes you..."

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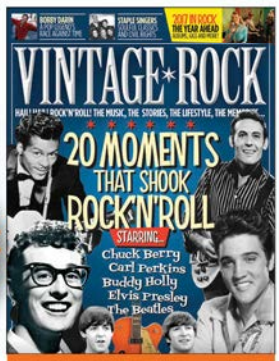

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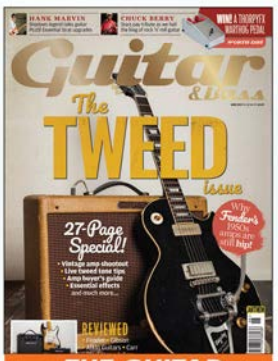

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NEW Vintage

Nashville-based guitarist JD Simo counts Joe Bonamassa as a friend and fan, and is rapidly becoming one of the one of the most hotly-tipped players in blues-rock. As his band prepare to drop a new album, Simo talks creative freedom and ultimate ES-335 tone, tips and technique...

Story **Sam Roberts** Photography **Martin Holmes**

By the time JD Simo was 15 years old, the Chicago-born guitarist had formed a band and sold 5,000 copies of their debut EP around Phoenix, Arizona, where he spent his teenage years, delighting audiences with his dynamic stagecraft and red hot guitar skills. In 2006, he moved to Nashville and spent five years an in-demand session musician. That was all to change in 2011, when he formed the psychedelic blues-rock band, SIMO, whose self-title debut troubled the top end of Billboard's blues chart.

Last year, SIMO returned with their second full-length, *Let Love Show The Way* – an album that showcases yet more of Simo's impressive guitar playing, as well as some sumptuous guitar tones courtesy of a '69 Plexi and a 70s Traynor. What's more, he was even brave enough to take these two vintage treasures on tour, at least for a while...

"They did come out with me, initially," Simo qualifies. "But about six months ago I had a big change, I was about 100 shows into the year and was feeling very stifled and bored, creatively. First of all I got my 335 back from Gibson after they made a signature model from it, then I decided I was gonna switch to an old Blackface Fender that I'd had for a long time. I wanted to see how it would fit into the context of our band.

"I felt like what I was using was fulfilling the childhood fantasy of all the heroes of mine, but what it was doing was an assimilation of what those guys were doing. Who really cares? Because it's already been done. For me it was looking for a way to push myself.

> "I felt like the gear I was using was fulfilling the childhood fantasy, but it was just an assimilation... who really cares? I was looking for a way to push myself"

"Now I tend to use an old Super Reverb or a Deluxe Reverb. I've also got these old Epiphone Futuras, Michael Bloomfield used them when he played with Bob Dylan in the 60s. It's the shittiest sounding amp you've ever heard but it's amazing. I leave the wobbly tremolo on the Epiphone on all the time and turn the reverb and tremolo on the Fender off and on using the stock footswitch. I'll turn the tremolo or reverb speed up or down throughout the course of the show. The point is that when I play it immediately sounds different to me and has helped me free myself."

With his ES-335 away at Gibson being measured up for a signature model, he didn't have a bad back-up – a 1957 Les Paul Goldtop owned by the legendary Duane Allman.

"I used Duane's guitar for pretty much all of the album," he recalls. "I've gotten to use it at a bunch of gigs. That guitar has been played by a lot of different people. We made the record in two days, that guitar was there so I used it.

"It was a great honour obviously, but what I keep trying to tell people is that it's a great instrument, it's inspiring to play, and it was an honour to use it in that circumstance but it's not gonna make you play great. It certainly didn't help me or hurt me, but it made the experience more fun."

Despite his temporary fling with Duane's guitar, he wasn't sad to see it go and pick up his ES-335 again.

"This is my guitar, y'know?" he insists. "At this point it's insane, I've gotten to play 130 to 140 Bursts, dozens of old Strats and Telecasters, real Gibson Flying Vs, pre-war Martins, D'Angelicos... I've got some incredible friends.

"The thing that's been good about that is it's shown me what a good instrument can be, and also what a shitty instrument can be. This guitar is the one that I'm the most comfortable with. When I got it, it was brand new, and now it's beaten to shit, and I did that!

That's not to say that he's not immune to having his head turned when the right instrument comes along, however...

"I have a beautiful 1960 Les Paul that a gentleman gave me to play, and when I put it on I feel different," he explains. "Not in a good way or a bad way, just different. Where as when I put this [335] on, I don't feel anything. I just feel comfortable.

"I'm not a big proponent of changing guitars a bunch. I always use the analogy of horn players like Cannonball Adderley or Wayne Shorter, who I love – they didn't gig with four saxes. They had their sax and that was their instrument. That's not as prevalent, in rock music. It's a little more showy. It's entertainment in the end, but I prefer the other."

Simo's stance on building a relationship with his instrument is commendable, lending itself to the way that he approaches his ES-335. He delivers a near telepathic partnership with the guitar, utilising every component, from playing percussive patterns behind the bridge to hitting natural harmonics past the 12th fret.

He also shows no dependency on stompboxes, using his controls and pick for almost all of his effects needs. "Running through a normal rig you can play quiet, and you have all the gain you'll ever need in there [volume pot]. One thing I had Joe Glaser do in Nashville, who's been a long time friend of mine, is put a push pull in here [tone knob], in the middle which makes it go out of phase, so I can sound like T-Bone Walker."

He prefers to use a wah pedal as a graphic equaliser for atmosphere and rhythmic patterns rather than as a traditional wah, even using his pick to create a record scratch sound by angling it against the wound strings. "You're only limited by your own imagination, there's so much you can do [just with the guitar]. Whatever I need is there."

Simo's expertise in pushing his creative envelope is clearly defined, so we asked him to give some advice on improving tone and technique – read them to your right...

Thanks to dBs Music for their help in putting this feature together. www.dbsmusic.co.uk

JD SIMO'S FIVE TIPS FOR BETTER TONE

1 Hand strength is key

"When I was in this club band in Nashville and I was having to play really fast Bluegrass stuff, I dedicated myself for a while just so I could play it! What happened was my normal hand strength for just bending to a note and being able to vibrato well improved.

"The thing that surprises me is working bands, people that have record deals, famous people, you'd be surprised how many of those guys couldn't keep it and not let it go. To me that's fundamental, because I couldn't do it at one point either. It's muscle memory. If you've got a handle on hand strength then you pile anything you want on top of it. What that hand strength is gonna give you is command over the neck."

2 A guitar is a lot like a drum

"The harder you hit it, the more it's gonna choke. You're gonna get a lot of attack but the note is gonna die off. Where as if you play it [gently and evenly] the string keeps vibrating. It keeps going because the string can vibrate. It's just like when you have a drummer that hits way too freakin' hard, you're gonna have all this attack but there's gonna be no tone in the drum."

3 Dynamic range is everything

"Dynamic range is everything in music. To me music should be from a whisper to a scream and everything in between. You should be able to accomplish that without touching a volume knob, so you can punctuate like you would when you're speaking."

4 Keep it simple

"Everything I do is essentially very simple. The beauty of the great simple players, whether you're talking bout Ry Cooder or Albert King or Kurt Cobain is phrasing. The point I'm trying to make is that it's easier to fill up space with notes and bullshit than it is to breathe and play conversationally."

5 Work on pick technique

"Getting tone out of the instrument and spending time working on pick technique, or lack thereof, and working on your hand strength is something you can exponentially improve even in a month's time. You'll see a hell of a change, because our muscle reflexes are quick. These are simple basic things.

"A lot of these basic things are things I think have gotten lost in the current age because they're not exciting, almost boring. It's those basic things that inherently make those players I look up to so special. Beauty in simplicity."

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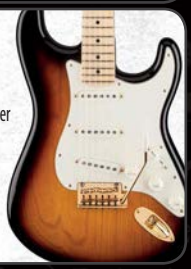

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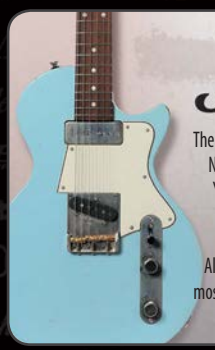

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DIY WORKSHOP

GOLDTOP CONVERSION

PART TWO

When you're converting an old Greco guitar into a retro LP-style Goldtop, what better reference point to have than the real thing? **HUW PRICE** sits down with an original '54 and gets his ruler out...

1 In the neck pickup rout you can make out the end of the neck tenon and see the wire channel in the bottom right corner

2 The wire channel re-emerges in the top corner of the bridge pickup rout

3 This diagram shows the dimensions of the cavities of both pickup routs on the '54

When you're embarking on a project that pays tribute to a classic, having access to the real thing is a dream come true. With that in mind, I'm extremely fortunate that Vintage Guitar Boutique talked the owner of this 1954 Goldtop into letting me borrow it once again.

Armed with digital callipers, a micrometer, a precision steel ruler and a profile gauge, the idea is to 'blueprint' this guitar to try and make our homage as close as possible to the real thing. We'll also be taking some detail shots to help with the finishing and ageing further down the line.

Getting the measure

Rather that explain a fairly straightforward but time consuming process in detail, I've put all the measurements into tables with both imperial and metric figures, which you can find on p62. Bear in mind that mid-1950s Gibsons were not made by CNC routing machines, so the figures apply to this Goldtop, but other Les Pauls from this era may vary to some degree.

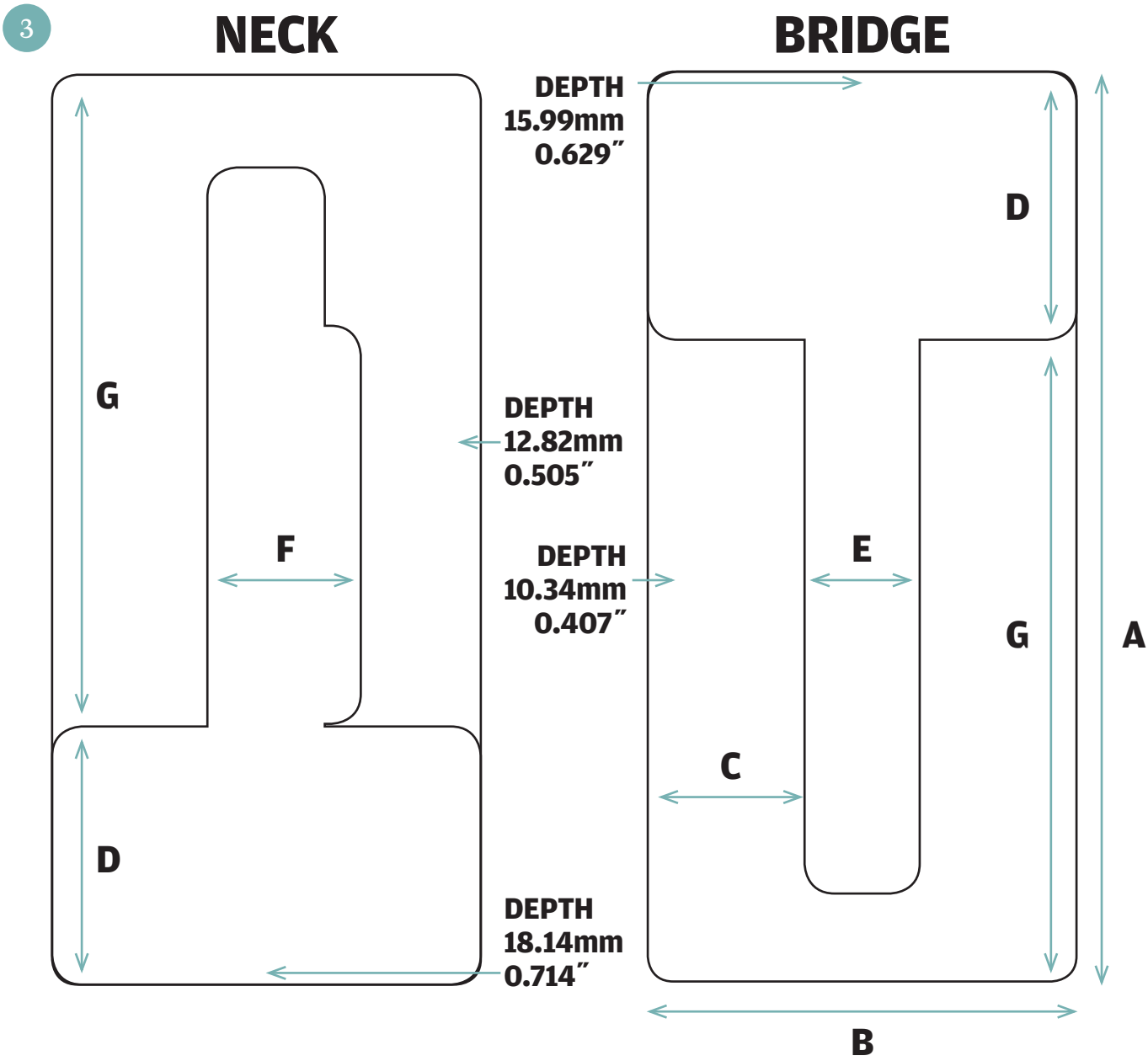
I've also provided diagrams for the pickup routs because it's the easiest way to present the information. In other areas, I created templates for reference. Simply remove the pickguard, place it upside down on a piece of A4 paper then draw around the edge and mark the position of the screws using a pencil. All measurements below 150mm are taken with digital callipers and I used a steel ruler for those above.

In-depth profile

In these circumstances, it would have been handy if I could have borrowed one of Gibson's Historic Division guys, along with their very impressive profile reading laser device to map out the neck contours of the '54, but without that, I'm just going to have to do it myself. The process is a bit more involved than taking straight point-to-point measurements, however, because the object is to record the shape and size, and subsequently create templates to guide the neck shaping.

The digital callipers give me accurate measurements of the neck depth and width at the 1st, 7th and 12th frets. For depth I take the measurements from just behind the frets because

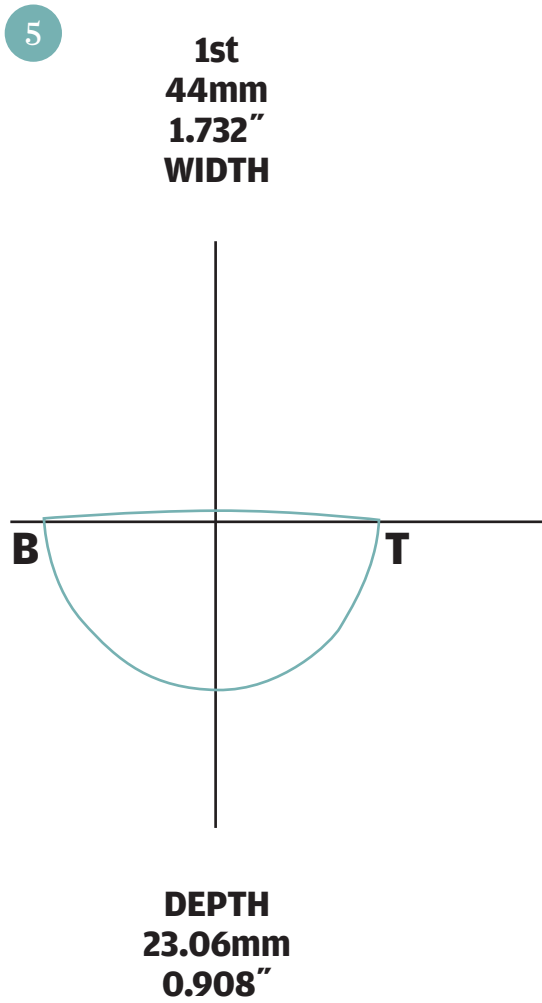
3



ALL DEPTH READINGS TAKEN AT ARROW TIP POSITIONS

ALL PICKUP ROUT CORNERS HAVE 0.5” DIAMETER

A – 87.61mm/3.45″
B – 34.35mm/1.352″
C – 12.1mm/0.476″
D – 26.3mm/1.035″
E – 9.62mm/0.379″
F – 13.9mm/0.538″
G – 61.48mm/2.42″



4 This profile gauge came from Wilco and the masking tape is used to protect the neck finish when taking readings

5 If you work carefully, it's surprising how accurate home made templates can be

removing the frets is obviously out of the question. To capture the neck profile at the 1st, 7th and 12th frets I use a profile gauge.

This is a gadget you can find at any decent tool suppliers, such as Axminster, Screwfix and even Wilko. My gauge came from Wilko and cost me £1.99. The gauges with fine metal needles will give you a more accurate reading than the ones with thicker plastic parts, however you should protect the neck you're reading from being scratched by using masking tape.

Reading a neck profile is fairly straightforward, but it has to be transferred onto paper or card to create carving templates. I begin by drawing a long straight line across the centre of a sheet of paper then drawing three shorter lines at right angles across the centre line. Taking my width measurements, I mark the points so that the bisecting lines are at the exact centre and the centre line represents the fingerboard edges. Lining up a 12-inch radius gauge with the width marks,

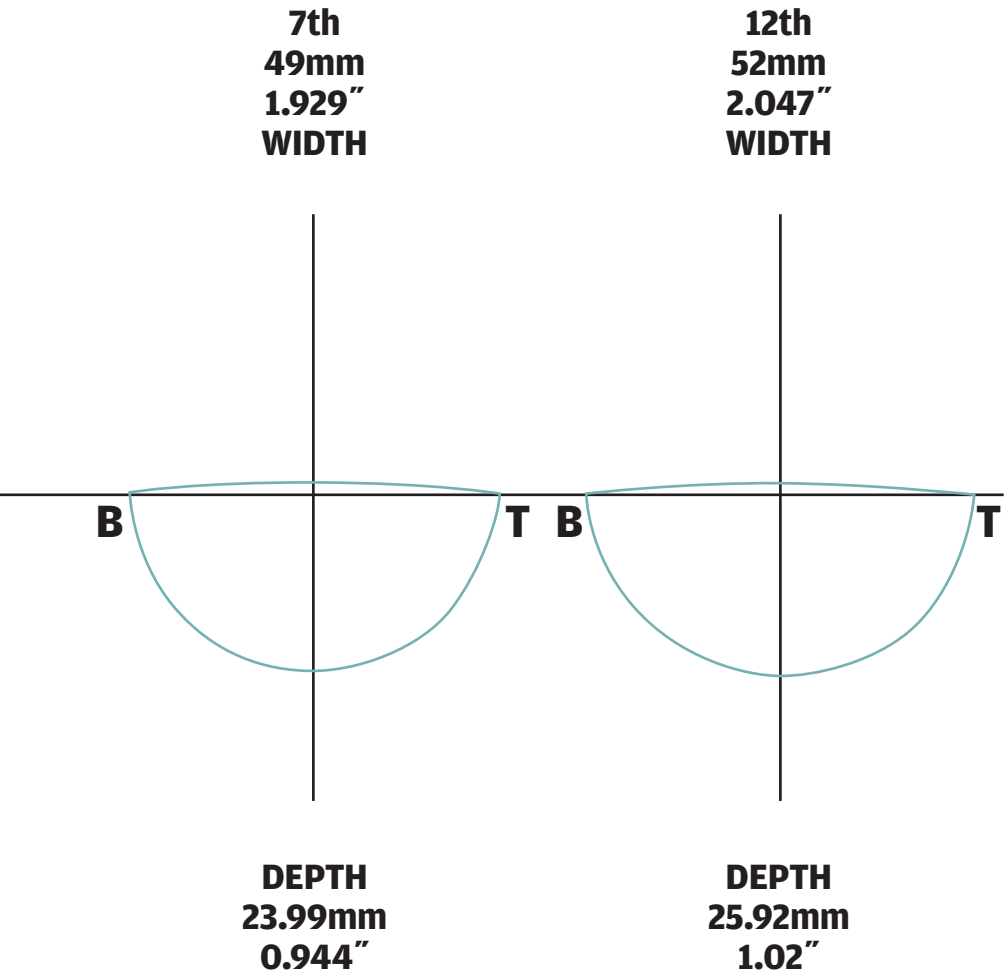
When you see the profile on paper, it reveals a great deal about the way Gibson carved its necks

I mark out the position of the fingerboard at each fret position. This gives me a position for the apex of the fingerboard at the centre point, and I use the digital callipers to mark the neck depth points on the centre line.

When using the profile gauge, I take a reading then place a sheet of paper along the very edge of a desk, then trace the profile reading onto the paper using a sharp pencil. The initial tracing will be a stepped line, but if the profile gauge's teeth are fairly fine, it's easy to turn it into a smooth curve.

When using a profile gauge like this, things always get a bit sketchy as things straighten out towards the fingerboard edges. In addition, the gauge also doesn't give you a clear indication of the depth. So when you cut out the shape with sharp scissors, continue past the edge points of the profile reading.

Next, take the cut out template and place it over the lines you marked out on the A4 sheet. Line up the apex of the curve with the depth point you have marked on the bisecting line and the sides of the template with your fingerboard edge marks, and then



trace the profile onto the A4 sheet of paper.

Granted, this is nowhere near as accurate as Gibson's hi-tech laser device, but if you use this method to create carving templates and check them against the original neck, you might be pleasantly surprised by how accurate they are. What's more, when you can see the profile marked out on paper, it reveals a great deal about the way Gibson's luthiers carved necks.

The shape of this '54 neck is somewhere between a D and a V, and there isn't even a hint of a shoulder anywhere along the length. The curve begins straight away at the edges of the board and progresses quickly. In my opinion it's the reason why vintage Gibson necks can be over an inch deep, yet still feel supremely comfortable. The oft-used terms 'clubby' and 'baseball bat' are simply inappropriate.

I'm planning to apply templates made using this procedure to finesse the Greco's neck. At present it feels too shallow and the profile is somewhere between a D and a U, so I hope there will be enough wood to work with. I guess I'll find out!

Wrap music

The next things on the agenda are the bridge studs and bushings. Much is made of the length of the bushings and the type of metal they're made from. According to the late Steve Rowan of Pigtail Music, vintage Gibson bushings were variously 0.5, 0.88, 1, and 1.25 inches in length and made from steel. Apparently many of the Gibson Historics have 0.75-inch brass bushings, but for wrapover tailpieces one-inch bushings are preferable because it helps to prevent bridges from leaning due to string pull.

These reference photos of the 1954 Goldtop's wear patterns will come in handy when it's time to age our Greco

This is one area where it may be advisable to deviate from vintage, because even with 0.88-inch bushings, the bridge studs on the Goldtop have begun to lean forwards and the wrapover is jacked back on its adjustment screws to compensate.

Common sense would suggest that longer is better when it comes to bushings because the deeper they're set into the body, the more resistant they should be to string pull. Having already extracted the Greco's bushings, I use a magnet to confirm they're steel and I was pleased to find they are also one inch long. With that in mind, I've decided to re-use them if possible, but I'll need to get some relic'd studs and a decision has to be made about the tailpiece.

It goes without saying that I wouldn't consider anything other than a proper 1950s spec lightweight aluminium tailpiece for this guitar. After all, the object here is to try and achieve something that's as close as possible to the real thing sonically as well as aesthetically and physically. In my view a lightweight aluminium tailpiece is one of the best bang for buck upgrades you can make to Les Paul and ES-style guitars if you're chasing vintage tone.

A lightweight aluminium tailpiece is one of the best bang for buck upgrades for a Les Paul

This Greco has long been fitted with a very nice relic'd Faber aluminium tailpiece and I'd certainly like to continue using it if possible. The complication, however, is that wrapover tailpieces are drilled and tapped at the back of the 'ears' to accommodate grub screws. These screws allow each end of the bridge to be moved further away from the neck and thereby provide some rudimentary intonation adjustment.

Faber sells aluminium wrapover bridges with adjustment screws, but my tailpiece was the type designed for use with tune-o-matic bridges. One solution is to drill and tap the ears to accommodate grub screws – in other words, to

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'54 GOLDTOP MEASUREMENTS

PICKUP POSITIONING

- **12th fret to neck pickup poles centre to centre** 117.12mm/4.611"
- **12th fret to bridge pickup poles** 280mm/11"
- **Pole to pole spacing** 113.12mm/4.453"
- **Bridge pickup cover to treble stud head** 9.27mm/0.366"
- **Bridge pickup cover to bass stud** 20.33mm/0.8"

convert a regular tailpiece for use as a wrapover bridge.

You can buy metal tapping kits quite easily, or find a local metal worker to do the job for you. The Allen grub screw in the bridge of the '54 is 0.132 inches in diameter and about 0.3 inches long – anything close to that should suffice.

On a scale of...

I've learned the hard way that it's better to make guitar building mistakes before spraying the finish, so I prefer to perform a dry run as early as possible to check alignments and flag up any potential issues. In this case I decided to locate the correct position for the wrapover bridge.

This flags up a potential issue regarding vintage Gibson scale length. Although it was nominally 24.75 inches, in actuality the scale length of mid-to-late 1950s Gibsons was very slightly shorter. The way to assess scale length is to measure the distance from the nut to the centre of the 12th fret and then double it. For a 24.5-inch scale length you should see 12.38 inches, but this Goldtop actually measures 12.28 inches, which equates to a scale length of 24.56 inches. So the vintage Gibson scale length is actually 0.19 inches shorter than it is widely assumed to be.

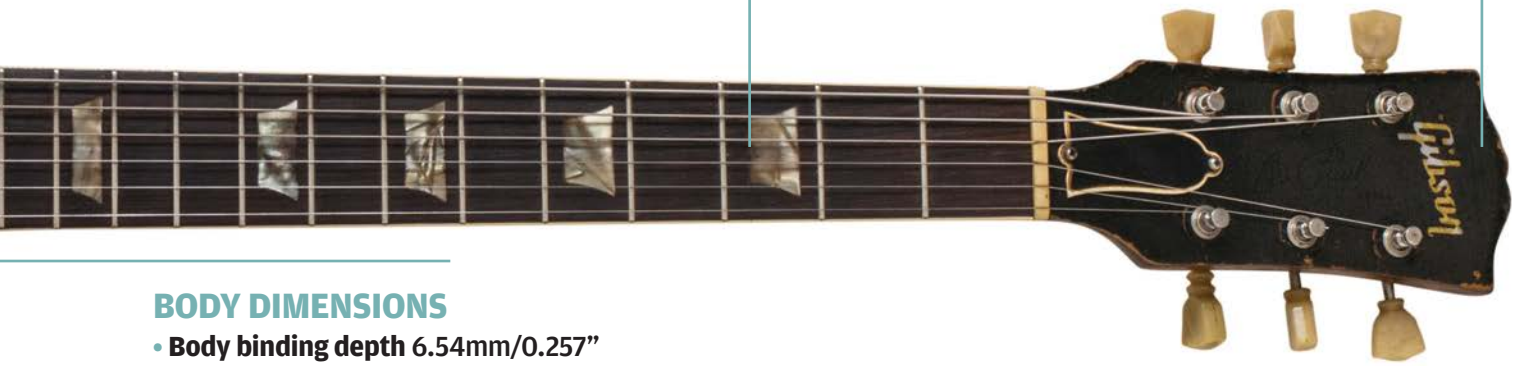
Gibson used 'the rule of 18' because it was the traditional method of determining fret intervals. By successively dividing the scale length – minus the offset to the previous fret – by 18, you can determine all the fret positions. For the greatest tuning accuracy the figure should actually be 17.817, but remember those guys didn't have pocket calculators, let alone computers or smart phones, and dividing by 18 would have been a lot easier.

These days, most guitar manufacturers divide by 17.817, and that's certainly what the people at the Fujigen Gakki factory did when building this Greco. Consequently the scale length is bang on 24.75 inches. But does it make much of difference when the guitar is in your hands? Well, when we attended the launch of the B&G Little Sister Crossroads back in May, The North American Guitar had arranged for Robbie McIntosh to demo it. During soundcheck he played the more affordable, 'rule of 17.817' Crossroads for a while, and

NECK DIMENSIONS

- **Neck width at 12th fret** 52.4mm/2.06″
- **Neck depth 1st fret** 23.06mm/0.908″
- **Neck depth 7th fret** 23.97mm/0.944″
- **Neck depth 12th fret** 25.92mm/1.02″
- **Heel depth from bottom of binding** 39.06mm/1.525″
- **Heel length** 19.88mm/0.783″
- **Neck binding depth max** 4.71mm/0.185″
- **Neck binding width** 0.98mm/0.038″
- **Marker dot diameter** 2.5mm/0.1″
- **String spacing at nut** 35.82mm/1.41″
- **String spacing at bridge** 51.77mm/2.038″
- **Fret width** 2.15mm/0.085″

HEADSTOCK DIMENSIONS

- **Headstock width at top** 75.6mm/2.971″
- **Headstock width at nut end** 68.26mm/2.7″
- **Headstock depth at top** 14mm/0.54″
- **Headstock depth at nut end** 15mm/0.6″
- **Truss rod cover gap from nut** 5.33mm//0.21″
- **Top centre of 'G' to top of headstock** 19.48mm/0.767″
- **Top of 'N' to top of headstock** 16.48mm/0.649″
- **Nut width** 43.08mm/1.694″
- **Nut thickness** 4.89mm/0.192″

BODY DIMENSIONS

- **Body binding depth** 6.54mm/0.257”
- **Body binding width max** 1.62mm/0.064”
- **Switch cavity diameter** 35.73mm/1.407”
- **Height of arch on lower bout** 11.1mm/0.44”
- **Knob diameter** 25.4mm/1”
- **Knob height** 12.51mm/0.492”
- **22nd fret centre to edge of bass tailpiece screw head** 176.212mm/6.94”
- **22nd fret centre to edge of bass tailpiece screw head** 165.1mm/6.5”
- **Tailpiece studs** 22.225mm/0.88” long
- **Bushing hole depth** 21.884mm/0.86”
- **Bushing depth below surface** 2.12mm/0.083”

then he swapped over to a Tel Aviv-made model, which used the rule of 18. Within seconds he was asking if the scale length was different – so there you are!

Regardless of whether mere mortals would notice any difference in tone or feel, it certainly makes a difference when determining the correct bridge placement. You can see from my measurements where the Goldtop's bridge posts are located in relation to the 22nd fret. If I were to apply the same measurement to the Greco, the bridge would end up too far forward and I would almost certainly have difficulty setting the intonation.

Fortunately, I remembered to measure the nut to saddle distances for the two E strings before I dismantled the Greco. They were 627mm (24.685 inches) and 634.5mm (24.89 inches) for the high and low E respectively. I carefully positioned the bridge on the Greco body to ensure the centre line of the bridge was exactly the same distance away from the nut at each end. I then brought it forward by 3mm to allow for some intonation adjustment range and marked it on the body.

My original intention had been to finish up this workshop with the bridge installed and the guitar strung up, however I decided against it. The existing PAF routs are 7mm wider than P-90 routs and by my calculations the treble side bushing would end up only 5mm or so away from the bridge rout. The bushings must fit very tightly into their holes and will have to be pressed or tapped in.

With so little wood around the bushing, the risk of splitting the body is too great. Instead, I'm going to plug the PAF routs before installing the bridge, but that can wait for now!

NEXT MONTH...

Huw puts the Greco Goldtop project aside for a month and turns his attention to a rare vintage 1970s Marshall combo with one or two tone-killing problems to diagnose and remedy in order to bring the amp back to match fitness

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Gear Reviews

By the time you read this, the *GM* team will have returned from Summer NAMM, whistles wetted by all the exciting new gear we'll be bringing to you over the next six months. In the meantime, there's plenty of brilliant new stuff to keep you entertained, from stunning Custom Shop Gretsches to a slimmed-down version of Line 6's amazing Helix processor, via stunning boutique effects from JHS, Origin and Keeley, and a Brit maker reborn in Gordon Smith. So don't delay – turn the page and let's get started!

Gretsch Custom Shop 1962 G6122 Country Gentleman Relic 66
A Custom Shop retro recreation for the ages

Gordon Smith Graf Deluxe 72
UK maker gets a new lease of life and a new range

Line 6 Helix LT 76
Slimmed down version of the high-end multi-effects

Two Notes Torpedo 80
A rackmount loadbox with built-in modeling

JHS Pedals VCR Ryan Adams & Milkman 84
Signature three-in-one and a retro echo box

Keeley D&M Drive 86
Twin drive/boost pedal from 'That Pedal Show' guys

Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe 89
The stunning compressor gets a smaller form factor

Orange Kongpressor 91
A unique and inventive take on compression from Orange

Electro-Harmonix Canyon & Blurst 92
Clever multi-delay and some weird noise fun

Seymour Duncan Forza 94
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Country Style

Thanks to George Harrison, the G6122 Country Gentleman is the most iconic double-cutaway Gretsch, and here it's recreated in true vintage style by Master Builder Stephen Stern and his Custom Shop team. **HUW PRICE** goes up-country...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Stephen Stern's Gretsch Custom Shop creations have been dazzling guitar players for years now, so much so that even the act of opening the case of his latest vintage love letter is an event in itself. The case is a gorgeous repro of a 60s example, which feels a fair bit heavier than an original, but the lid opens to reveal plush burgundy velvet with the iconic Gretsch banner, and of course, the imposing presence of a guitar that somehow appears neither ancient, nor entirely new.

What the thinline G6122's body lacks in depth it makes up for in width, measuring a full 17 inches across the lower bout. The ruddy brown Walnut Stain has the muted but deep vintage lustre that so few artificial agers seem to get right; great restraint is shown with the dents and scratches, but lacquer checking can be seen all over the body and headstock. Interestingly, Gretsch has elected to avoid checking on the back of the neck and the finish here hasn't been dulled either.

The checking stops at the outer edges of the back pad, beneath which the finish looks shinier. Again this is the sort of detail that lifts relicing from the artificial to the artful. The checking on the front looks a touch 'aerosol induced', but the way it follows the grain lines on the back is a lot closer to the real deal.

> Great restraint is shown with the dents and scratches – it lifts the relicing from artificial to artful

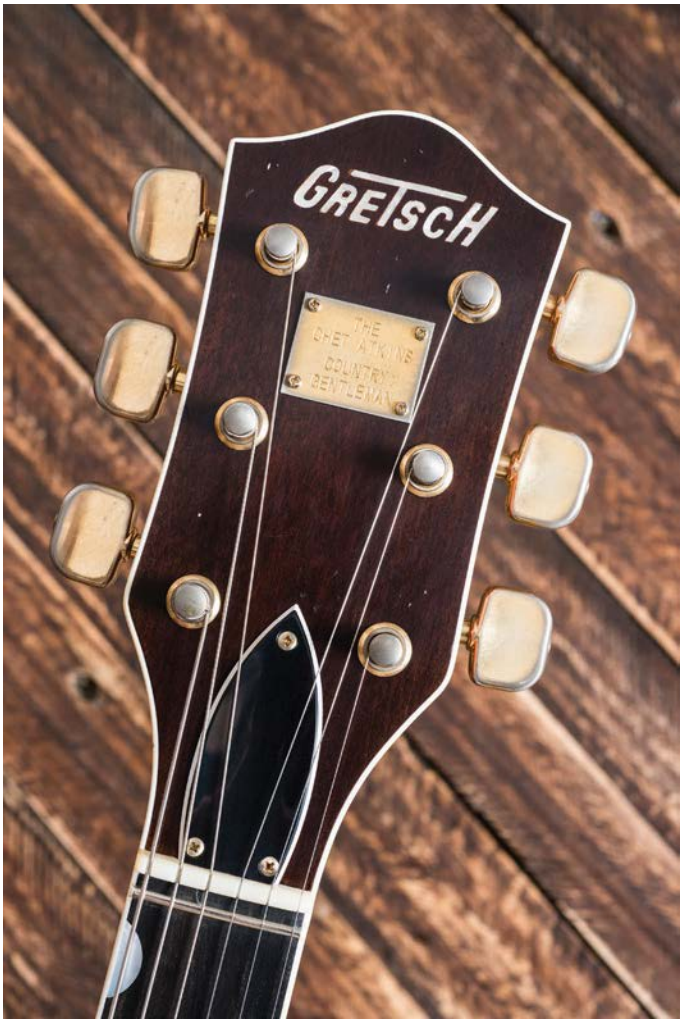
No doubt a guitar like this with fresh gold hardware would be an assault on the senses – it must have felt as opulent as a Trump Tower toilet back in the day. On this guitar, however, the plating has been given a sense of play wear patina that is about 70 per cent nickel and only 30 per cent gold. It looks tremendous, and trust us when we say that ageing gold hardware is not a task for the faint of heart...

The mechanisms for the mutes look alarming, but are solidly made contraptions, with levers mounted on glued wooden bases and L-bracket pivots screwed into the braces.

The braces themselves have been altered to provide clearance

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Nobody does Gretsch-style guitars as well as Gretsch, so let's consider a couple of alternative Country Gents. The **Gretsch G6122T-62 1962 (£2,869)** also features TV Classics and this non-relic'd repro is from the Professional Collection series. The **Player's Edition G6122T (£2,475)** has bound open f-holes and ML bracing. It also has to be said that you can buy **mid-60s Country Gents** in decent condition for around the **£3,000** mark



KEY FEATURES

Gretsch Custom Shop 1962 G6122 Country Gentleman Relic

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-acoustic 6-string electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £7,016
- **BUILD** 3-ply laminated maple body, set maple neck with deep C profile, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with pearl thumbnail markers and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Bigsby vibrato, Tru-Arc bar bridge, waffle-back Grover tuners, 'G' top knobs
- **ELECTRICS** TV Jones Classic Filter'Tron humbucking pickups, master volume, individual volume controls, three-way tone switch, three-way pickup selector switch, on/off switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.7mm at nut, 52.7mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.95kg/8.7lbs
- **FINISHES** Walnut Stain nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Guitar Village 01252 726821 www.**guitarvillage.co.uk** **www.gretschguitars.com**

for the levers and it looks like they were roughly chiselled out. This is probably the way Gretsch would have done it back in the day, and that's the sort of detail we can appreciate.

From the fret nibs to the colour of the marker dots and even the shade of tinted lacquer sprayed over the binding, we can't fault the build quality. Even if most of the original double-cut Gretsch Country Gents were not quite so flawless, this G6122 doesn't feel overly perfect or lacking in character but rather has the aura of a Gretsch that has been 'done right'.

In Use

Despite its lack of a centre block or trestle bracing, the G6122 is a portly gent, but the body weight offsets the heavy tuners and it balances well. The neck is a decent handful with a fat C verging on U profile. It reminds us of the 1960 Anniversary featured in a recent Vintage Bench Test – there is a bit of a shoulder under the fingerboard binding, but the overall feel is both comfortable and familiar.

Closed f-holes make a massive difference to acoustic tone. It sounds lot closer to our closed-f-hole '63 Tennessean than our open f-hole 1960 Anniversary. It's a fatter and smoother sound with massive depth but a rolled off treble response.

Having said that, the G6122 has a richer tone than our Tennessean, and much longer sustain. It's louder, too, and the tone retains smoothness and evenness up the neck until the 17th fret. Above that things get a little uneven and sustain is lost, but that happens with jazz-style fingerboard extensions beyond the neck tenon.

Vintage Gretsches are notorious for buzzes, rattles and unwanted noises. This G6122 only has one such issue and it's frequency-related: play an A note on the top E string at the 17th fret or the B string at the 22nd fret and a buzz sets in. It's certainly mechanically-induced and no doubt it can be remedied. But we're really splitting hairs here – this guitar is an absolute joy to play unplugged.

Much of this 'good behaviour' can be attributed to the Tru-Arc bar bridge. Gretsch buys in premium parts for its top of the line models, pre-empting the upgrade impulse. These bridges, along with the TV Jones Classic Filter'Tron pickups, are a case in point. The bridge radius is matched to the 'board, which ensures better-than-vintage playability and helps with intonation.

TV Classics can sound aggressive in some guitars, but they are utterly fantastic in this one. Having said that, Filter'Trons are finickity things and the Custom Shop has done well to set the pickup heights and line up all the polepieces perfectly for balance and string-to-string definition.

Plugged in, this G6122 is endlessly fascinating because it's so full of contradictions. It's full-bodied and twangy, low-ish in output yet growly and snarly, clear and pure but harmonically rich and sometimes gritty. Although the bridge pickup has some quack, it's nothing like the blackguard/jazzbox hybrid tone you might associate with Brian Setzer.

This G6122 is woodier, smoother and more refined-sounding than a 6120. It's also easier to play because it's less prone to feedback. It evokes an era of electric guitar music that came before obsessions with volume, distortion and sustain. Everyone who tried it in the *GM* office seemed compelled to delve into their mid-period Beatles repertoires, dredge up half forgotten Kinks tunes or crank it up for some CSNY and AC/DC.

Relatively few of us will know how a brand new Country Gent would have felt in the 1960s. But if they were anything like this guitar, it's no wonder that so many of the great players used them because it's a seriously high-end experience. Without sacrificing the quirkiness and oddball charm that is so quintessentially Gretsch, this Custom Shop G6122 is a luxury ride by any standards and, age notwithstanding, it is among the finest sounding and playing Gretsch guitars that we have ever encountered.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Outstanding build quality with top-notch relic'ing
+ Extraordinary tone
+ Any minor deviations from vintage spec actually improve the guitar
+ Usable 'mud switch'

- One tiny frequency-related buzz that should be a simple fix

We have no doubt that Gretsch's current Custom Shop creations are some of the best guitars the company has ever made. The price of admission excludes all but the most well-heeled collectors and pros, but it's justified by breathtaking build, feel and tone

10/10

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Guitar Village stocks the Gretsch range from top to bottom, including Custom Shop beauties, high-end production models, and more affordable Streamliner and Electromatic guitars

VILLAGE LIFE

Situated in the leafy environs of Farnham in Surrey, in a 15th Century building no less, Guitar Village has long been destination guitar shop for discerning players and rock stars alike and it's soon to become a mecca for Gretsch fans. *TGM* meets the store's proprietor, Derek Eyre-Walker...

Whether it's satisfying the six-string appetites of famous customers such as Ron Wood, Johnny Depp, Noel Gallagher and Roger Taylor or supplying period-correct instruments for the Million Dollar Quartet stage show, there's little doubt that Guitar Village offers, as owner Derek Eyre-Walker puts it, a "smorgasbord" for guitar fans. Though it opened in 1987, the store began life a decade earlier, approximately 10,500 miles away.

"It started in Australia," Derek remembers. "I went out there and opened up in '77, and for about 10 years I was still in touch with England and America, buying guitars and amps. That was in Melbourne, Guitar Village is still going out there. I came back here in the late 80s and got a titchy little place across the road. I moved across here shortly after, about '88 or '89, and got the two cottages. And about 10 years ago we got the main building. We try to be as open as we can for the players and only shut four days a year."

And what a building it is. Built in 1467, the property offers around 15 rooms in which players can audition instruments in private, under no pressure to purchase. "You can come in, try the guitar out, if you don't want to commit you can go home," says Derek. "Then the photo on the website is the guitar you tried, and if it's sold online it goes straight to the workshop, gets a new set of strings, the works; it gets triple-checked for the customer."

Custom Shopping

A vintage guitar collector of some note, Derek has long been a fan

of the classic Gretsch models, and Guitar Village recently took delivery of a pair of Custom Shop instruments that are just the tip of the iceberg: "As it's still early days for us in terms of Gretsch Custom Shop, we thought, 'Why don't we give it the vintage vibe first and when we've got half a dozen of the classic models, then we'll maybe look at doing modern stuff... some wacky Gretsch stuff.' Stephen Stern is doing a fantastic job, the attention to detail is wonderful."

If he was spec'ing a Gretsch Custom instrument for personal use, like many of us, Derek would find it rather difficult to decide what to choose: "Maybe a mid-50s, straight down the line 6120, not over-reliced – I think that's pretty iconic. But the lovely little Duo Jets are great guitars, Round Ups, with the old buckle tailpieces and so forth... let's not forget single-cut White Falcons!"

With more Custom Shop models on order and an array of Gretsch guitars from the affordable Streamliners to the new Players Edition and Vintage Select models, Guitar Village is a must-visit for fans of 'That Great Gretsch Sound'. Now, let's settle into that well-worn leather armchair with that glorious Custom Shop Country Gentleman. Or perhaps the G6128 Duo Jet. Decisions, decisions...

> "Stephen Stern is doing a fantastic job, the attention to detail is wonderful"

Visit www.guitarvillage.co.uk to see more of their Gretsch range

Gordon Smith Graf Deluxe

With the UK maker under new ownership, Gordon Smith is back with new guitars and big plans. But can the Graf Deluxe generate interest? **HUW PRICE** revs it up...

Gordon-Smith is a name that will doubtless be familiar to many of you – the UK's longest running production guitar company launched in the mid-1970s and built up something of a cult following over the decades. This was based on a reputation for creating no-frills guitars that blended solid build quality with decent materials, hardware and pickups, all at very affordable price points compared to the glamorous brands from across the pond.

The company was always a quintessentially British affair. Husband and wife team Chris and Linda ran Gordon-Smith from an old industrial building near Manchester, where they created quality mid-priced guitars that UK guitar players were crying out for. Back in 1974, the affordable end of the guitar market was nowhere near as saturated as it is today. Instead you had a handful of premium brands offering a limited selection of models at the top end, and a plethora of frankly dire knock-offs at the other.

It's no wonder that so many pub-rockers and proto-punks felt that a Gordon Smith was a cracking investment – as evidenced by a user list featuring Buzzcocks, Preachers, Subs, Roses and even Billy Bragg.

While some of these artists did move on to more fashionable heritage brands eventually, for many their Gordon-Smith was the only guitar they ever needed, and never stopped playing their GS1s, Gypsys and Geminis.

After five-decade career, however, Chris and Linda decided to retire, and put the company up for sale. It was bought by Auden guitars, who moved production to a new 3,000 square foot workshop in Northamptonshire. Refreshingly, this means that despite a change of ownership (and the loss of a hyphen in the brand name), Gordon Smith guitars are still being made in the UK and Chris Smith participated in the handover to acquaint Auden's team of luthiers with Gordon-Smith's traditional production processes.

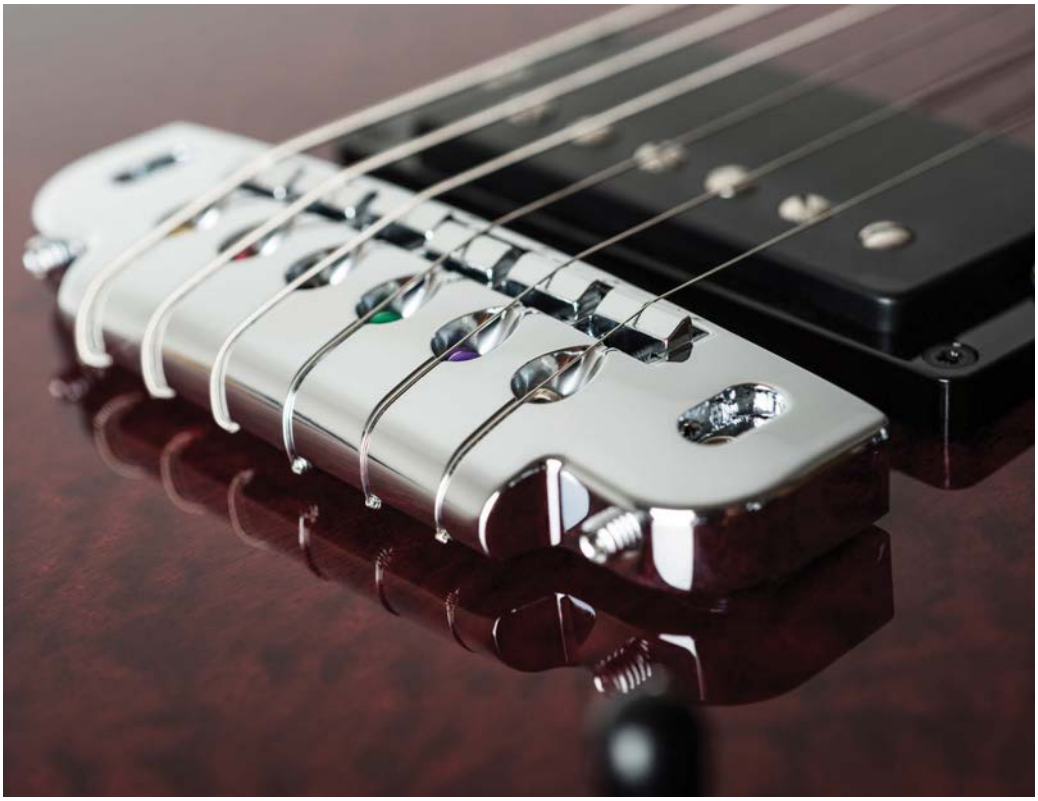
If you've played or owned a Gordon-Smith, the chances are it's probably been one of the firm's variations on the Les Paul Junior or Special, but our first encounter with the reborn GS is via one of its lesser known models, the Graf Deluxe. And sitting down with it, the initial vibe is more Music Man than Macclesfield, with its offset single-cutaway poplar body, beaky headstock profile and figured pommele veneer top.

> Everything sounds even and nicely balanced, and there's no shortage of natural sustain

It's fairly uncommon to see a bolt-on maple neck with a wrapover tailpiece, but the workaround for the potential mismatch is a noticeable

KEY FEATURES

Gordon Smith Graf Deluxe

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody 6-string electric guitar. Made in the UK
- **PRICE** £910 (as spec'd, prices start at £850, see website for options)
- **BUILD** Poplar body with figured pommele veneer top, front edge plastic binding and bolt-on maple neck with maple fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh wrapover bridge, Deluxe 18:1 tuners
- **ELECTRICS** GSG Humbucker and GSG SC pickups, master volume & tone controls, 3-way pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 20mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.5kg/7.7lbs
- **LEFT HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Various (see website)
- **CONTACT** Dist-X Distribution 01604 817817 **www.gordonsmithguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The mahogany-bodied **St Blues Mississippi Bluesmaster (£930)** has through-body stringing and coil-splitting humbuckers. Besides the locking trem and the 4+2 headstock, the DiMarzio AXIS-loaded **Sterling By Music Man AX40-D (£749)** has a similar vibe to the Graf Deluxe

back angle. Judging by the tightness of the neck to body contact area, this has been done properly by routing the bottom of the neck pocket at an angle rather than through the use of shims.

The truss rod adjuster is located at the body end of the maple neck and it's the spoke wheel type you can crank side on without having to de-string or remove the neck – always a welcome thing to see. Rosewood dot markers compliment the glued on maple fingerboard, and a solid brass nut is attached, in the Danelectro-style, with screws entering the end of the 'board.

The controls are tightly clustered and include master volume and tone knobs alongside a three-way selector switch. Coil splitting has long been a Gordon Smith staple and sure enough, the volume control is a push/pull that does just that. Gordon-Smith always made its pickups in-house, and it's no different with the new generation Graf Deluxe.

Overall, the standard of finishing is decent for this price point, however the nut could be fitted a little more neatly – it's slightly narrower than the neck, leading to colour bleed around the edges and what appears to be a slight gap between the nut and the end of the fingerboard on the treble side. We also notice that the springs under the neck pickup lack sufficient strength to hold it in position properly, so if you catch it as you strum, it'll bounce around a bit inside the oversized rout.

In Use

Picking the Graf up and giving it a strum unplugged is very encouraging, with full-bodied mids, deep bass and clear but sweet treble response. Everything sounds even and nicely balanced, and there's no shortage of natural sustain. It's a comfortable player, too, with a medium D neck profile that retains a very even depth from headstock to heel. One thing that may take some getting used to is the offset tuner layout – the B string tuner is located where you would expect the G string tuner to be in a non-offset three-a-side, so be careful you don't tune the wrong string!

When it comes to the pickup voicings, Gordon Smith has gone for contrasts rather than variations on a theme. The bridge-position humbucker is thick, dark and growly, while angled single coil in the neck has a much lower output and is a lot brighter. It's the sort of thing that you'd get from a HSS or HSH shred guitar, where dramatic tone changes are possible at the flip of a switch.

In practice, this does present some challenges when setting up your amp for more vintage-style fare – do you optimise your settings for the bridge or neck pickup? This dilemma is compounded somewhat by the Graf Deluxe's single tone control.

If you choose to go bright to get some bite and clarity from the humbucker, you'll be presented with a fine tone that's full and warm both clean and with a bit of dirt – even if you can't completely dial out slightly nasal upper mids. But when you then flip over to the neck, it sounds like a different guitar – this is a very bright single coil, so when your amp has been dialled in to compensate for the humbucker's darkness, things can become a tad thin, glassy and shrill.

When you roll some treble off at the amp, the neck pickup does really sweeten up, and you can achieve some meaty clarity and smoothness. However, using these settings then means that the nasal qualities of the humbucker are kicked up to a level that's borderline adenoidal.

That being said, hot-wound humbuckers tend to produce decent results when coil-split, and this is no exception. The tonal contrast between the pickups remains, but it's more akin to the neck/bridge set-up on a Telecaster, and with the coil-split engaged, the Graf Deluxe produces three thoroughly enjoyable tones that coexist happily with the same amp settings.

The Graf Deluxe has much to commend it. It's a shame that the pickup balance with the bridge unit in full humbucking mode isn't quite right, because if that was tweaked this guitar would be on another level. That said, it's still a unique guitar with easy playability, excellent resonance and some good sounds can be found with a bit of patience. What's more, all Gordon Smith guitars are hand-built in the UK to order, so you can spec everything from woods and neck profile, to pickups and hardware. The chances are that GS's luthiers can create the ideal blend for you.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Full and resonant unplugged tone
+ Easy playability and stable tuning
+ Made-to-order flexibility at non-boutique prices

- Oddly matched pickups
- Some detailing issues in nut area
- Neck pickup springs are very soft

There's lots to like about the Graf Deluxe. While the pickups can be a bit troublesome to balance, the playability and unplugged tone are hard to ignore and custom options are plentiful

8/10

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Two Notes Torpedo Studio

This rackmount beast claims to be the best way to record traditional valve amps without making a racket. Will **RICHARD PURVIS** enjoy the sound of silence?

KEY FEATURES

Two Notes Torpedo Studio

- **PRICE** £1,369
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual-channel load/DI box with cab, mic and room simulation. Made in France
- **FRONT PANEL** Input level, LCD screen with navigation buttons and master dial, output level, headphone output with level control
- **REAR PANEL** Amp input with switchable impedance (4/8/16), speaker thru, two jack/XLR analogue inputs, two XLR analogue outputs, USB, AES/EBU and S/PDIF in and out, MIDI in and out/thru, word clock in
- **FEATURES** 50 cabinets, 8 microphones, 8 power amp emulations; low cut, EQ, exciter, compressor and reverb; controlled via LCD screen or using free Torpedo Remote software (Mac/PC) via USB
- **DIMENSIONS** 485 x 225 x 89mm (2U)
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group two-notes.com **audiodistributiongroup.com**

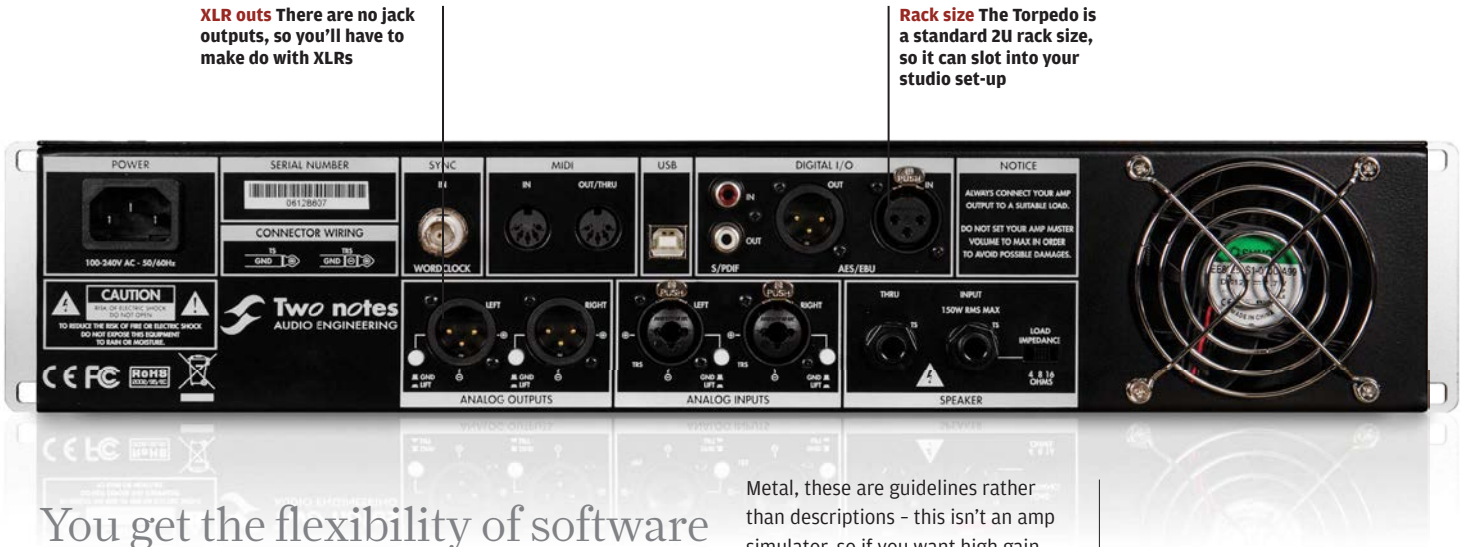
Sometimes a piece of gear comes in for review that's so beautiful, we're too busy making plans to elope with it to review the damn thing. This is not one of those products. Well, how can you covet something when you're not even sure what you'd use it for? But after a few days in the Torpedo Studio's company, we want one like a kid wants a puppy.

Hook this unit up to your favourite amplifier's speaker output and, in theory, you'll be able to capture that amp's lovely, authentic tonal essence without the inconvenience of deafening everyone within a half-mile radius. While acting as a dummy load to give the output stage something to push against – an essential safety requirement for any valve amp without a speaker connected – it converts your sound into the digital domain and runs it through sophisticated impulse responses (IRs) to simulate just about any combination of speaker, cabinet, microphone and recording space you could wish for.

Why is this better than just plugging a guitar straight into your DAW and loading up a modelling plug-in? Well, because this is using your real amp – all of it apart from the noisy bit at the very end. You get flexibility to rival the average software-only system, from changing mic placement to over-saturating your virtual speakers, not to mention adding compression, EQ and room reverb. And all of this is happening on two channels, so you can record two completely different sounds on separate tracks… or even three if you use the untreated 'speaker thru' output to record your real-life cab at the same time. Oh, and here's another option: set one of the channels to 'dry' for recording the pure sound of your amp to add cabinet emulation later.

Also on board are a selection of virtual power amps, so you can use the Torpedo Studio with a preamp pedal and leave real-world backline out of the equation altogether. There's a daunting array of inputs and outputs on the back panel, including digital outs (S/PDIF and AES/EBU), but most of us will be sticking with the two XLR sockets for feeding it into our recording hardware's analogue inputs.

Everything can be controlled on the little monochrome screen using a few buttons and a scrolling dial, but a better solution is to download the free Torpedo Remote software and hook the unit up to your Mac or



You get the flexibility of software using a real amp – all of it apart from the noisy bit at the end

PC via the included USB cable. Now everything is suddenly full-screen and full-colour, for much easier editing, and you also get the option of downloading more cabinets (for a few Euros each) from the Two Notes Boutique.

In Use

It takes just a few moments of level-tweaking before we have a perfectly usable, latency-free stereo sound coming from preset 'Clean 1'. In fact there are plenty of nice tones among the presets – even if, as ever with such things, many are in need of some editing to get them just right.

Being able to do that editing on two separate channels is great for creating stereo blends – say, one side with a dynamic mic right up against a punchy 1x12, the other filling things out with a ribbon mic a few feet away from a 4x12 in a more ambient room. Note that, while the presets have names like Crunch, Lead and Metal, these are guidelines rather than descriptions – this isn't an amp simulator, so if you want high gain you're going to have to provide it earlier in the signal chain.

There are some fantastic sounds to be found here – in particular, our AC15-style combo running through a pair of Two Notes' 1x12 cabs sounds more deliciously Voxy than anything this reviewer has ever managed to coax out of software alone. You may find that four or five good settings will provide all the sounds you could ever need, but there are lots more cabs available from the Boutique and you can also load up third-party IRs.

All of this is a doddle to navigate in Torpedo Remote, which looks a lot like a standard amp-modeller on

Torpedo Remote By far the easiest way to control the Torpedo is to hook it up to a PC and use the free Torpedo Remote software

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

You can cover at least some of the same ground with the **Sequis Motherload Elemental £300** or even Two Notes' own **Torpedo Reload £599**. Otherwise, turn to p24 for a hatful of other deafness-dodging ideas in our cover feature!

screen. You get eight mics to choose from, with an interactive graphic that's used for changing distance and angle, while compression settings and virtual recording spaces – from a totally dry studio to a cathedral – are just as easy to change. Then, switch it over to 'arcade' view and you can play with even more variables, including midrange contour and harmonic richness.

Among the most interesting tweaks on offer – particularly if you were paying attention during this month's cover feature – is the ability to switch between a reactive and a resistive load. The former type is designed to interact more realistically with an amp, and the result in this instance is a more bright and lively response that leaves the resistive option sounding a tad lifeless in comparison.

So what don't we like about the Torpedo Studio? Well, we're a little disappointed that, unlike some of Two Notes' cheaper DI solutions, this one doesn't allow you to apply any attenuation to the speaker output – it's full blast or nothing. Also less than ideal is the lack of any jack outputs – you'll need one or two spare XLR cables unless you prefer to keep things fully digital by working with AES/EBU.

Let's end on a more upbeat note, though, with a handy tip that we discovered by mistake. It turns out those emulated power amps sound really good even with a signal that's already been through a real one – adding a dose of single-ended EL34 can be a great way to turn a big tone into an absolutely walloping one.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ The sound of your amp, at its very best, through every kind of speaker cabinet imaginable
+ Supremely tweakable but easy to navigate on PC
+ Simultaneous recording of two different set-ups is a real bonus

- There are much cheaper ways to emulate guitar cabs
- It's a pity that you can't attenuate the speaker output

A pricey but ultra-powerful way to record your real valve amps in silence

8/10

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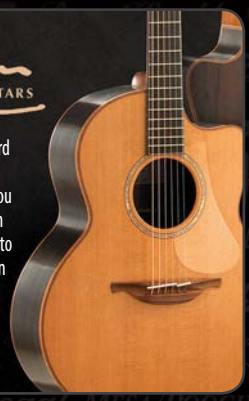

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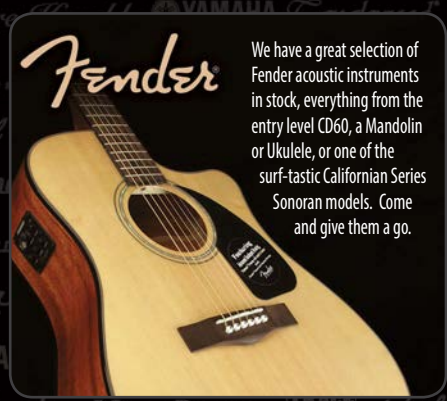

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Line 6 Helix LT

Pedals, amps, cabs, microphones – time to bin 'em all? **RICHARD PURVIS** tests the new slimmed-down version of Line 6's most powerful guitar processor, the Helix LT

Here's a thought to flatten the spirits of anyone over 40: there are skilled guitarists among us who weren't even born when Line 6 first appeared. It feels like about three weeks ago, but we've had 21 years of digital modelling progress since the launch of the original Flextone amplifier, which – with its 16 amp models plus a handful of basic effects – is starting to look rather quaint by today's standards.

And there's no better example of those standards than Line 6's current flagship product, the Helix. Available in floor and rackmount formats, this processing behemoth is packing over 100 effects and emulates dozens of amps and cabs, with virtual microphones allowing you to patch a complete guitar sound directly into your DAW. Add two rows of footswitches for tonal tap-dancing, and you can see why some guitar players are now letting one black slab take over all their amp and stompbox duties, both on the road and in the studio.

Assuming you're happy to toss all your analogue gear aside like a box of old VHS tapes (more on that question later), that just leaves one issue: the price. A four-figure SRP makes the full-fat Helix a daunting investment… and so, with a street price under £800, the LT version is here to persuade a few more digital doubters to make the leap.

> With a street price under £800, the LT is here to persuade digital doubters to make the leap

KEY FEATURES

Line 6 Helix LT

- **PRICE** £852
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital multi-effects and amp modeller. Made in China
- **TOP PANEL** Eight preset footswitches with capacitive 'touch' functionality, plus preset up/down, tap/tuner and mode; 6.2" 800x480 colour LCD screen with button controls, joystick and six function knobs; output volume, expression pedal
- **REAR PANEL** Inputs for guitar and second expression pedal; 2x FX send and return, 2x XLR outputs, 2x 1/4" jack outputs, headphone output; Variax guitar input, AES/EBU digital out, MIDI in and out/thru, USB (cable supplied), mains input and power switch
- **FEATURES** 62 guitar & bass amps, 37 cabinets, 16 microphones, 104 effects, looper, tuner; controlled via LCD screen or using Helix software (Mac/PC) via USB
- **DIMENSIONS** 529 x 300 x 90mm
- **WEIGHT** 5.67kg/12.5lbs
- **CONTACT** Yamaha UK 0844 811 1116 **uk.line6.com**

Wondering what the catch might be? Well, looking at the specs of the two units side by side, there really isn't much of one. The dual-DSP modelling of 104 effects, 62 amps, 37 cabs and 16 microphones is the same, as are the 800x480-pixel colour screen and tap-to-edit capacitive footswitches; all you're really losing are the little displays above each footswitch, the mic preamp and some of the extra ins and outs on the rear panel. But really, who needs four effects loops and three expression pedals anyway? It's still a sturdy all-metal build, and in fact you may even find this unit's cleaner, simplified top panel to be more appealing.

Included in the box is a USB cable for editing your sounds via Mac/PC software (a free download of around 90MB), and a USB stick containing the user manual. Oh, and for those of us who come over all queasy at the very sight of a manual, there's also a 'cheat sheet' giving a basic overview of what everything does.

In Use

It might be a bit much to ask for a device of this complexity to be truly 'plug and play', but flick the switch and workable tones are only a few stomps away. The up and down footswitches on the left are the key, allowing you to scroll through groups of eight presets which can then be selected using the other switches. These presets are split into 'setlists', with 128 in each; you start out with two factory setlists (256 presets) but there's room for six more of your own, so you could store over 1,000 different sounds in this unit. Enough to be getting on with, eh?

The eight presets on the first screen alone include an array of mic'd amp tones that are as diverse as they are convincing: Marshall, Vox, Mesa/Boogie and Fender are all covered here. Preset 02A (US Small Tweed) deserves a special mention because it really does capture a lot of the rich and raucous charm of a real vintage Fender – and let's be honest, that's not something you'd ever say of a Flextone. Blasting through the two factory setlists, everything from twinkly Blackface cleans to moody stereo soundscapes is impressively lifelike in feel as well as tone... and we haven't even started editing yet.

Ah, editing. This is where the Helix LT becomes a dream and a little bit of a nightmare at the same time. Once you've learned to find your way around the user interface, the ability to mess about with pedal chains, valve biasing and cab/mic impulse responses is a joy; but the combination of a joystick, buttons, pushable knobs and footswitches can get rather overwhelming.

Loading up the desktop software helps, but you don't always want to be tied down by that USB cable. So while the capacitive footswitches work well – stomp to engage an effect, or touch lightly to select for editing – it's a pity Line 6 hasn't yet applied the same tech to its displays. Hey, this is the touchscreen generation – even the Queen has an iPad now! – and at times we actually find ourselves instinctively trying to tap the on-screen buttons instead of hitting the real ones.

A different kind of annoyance is the brief moment of silence when you jump between presets – so you won't want to be doing that in mid-song if you're using it as a pedalboard. The solution is to store 'snapshots' within a preset, giving you up to eight variants of each core sound to play with: changing gain levels, bypassing effects and so on. And the effects themselves are generally excellent.

We all know what to expect from Line 6's delays and reverbs, as well as the handful of synth and filter sounds that are included here. The modulation effects are also very strong, but the real test is the dirty stuff – something that's arguably been a weak point of Line 6's effects since the early days.

Next to an M-Series unit built around the company's previous generation of DSP, the Helix LT's low-gain overdrives sound much more smooth and natural – and there's even a half-decent attempt at a Klon type. The emulations of full-on distortion units such as the RAT and Big Muff Pi still come across a bit scratchy, though, and that's especially true when compared directly with the real thing – the original pedals have a distinctly more airy, musical feel. It's funny, really – it seems the real valve overdrive of a tweed Deluxe is easier to emulate than the faux-valve overdrive of a pedal. We'll stick to the former!

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

For the same sounds with a bit more control and lots of extra inputs and outputs, go for the **Line 6 Helix Floor (£1,279)**. If you like the idea of touchscreen control, see the **HeadRush Pedalboard (£899)**; and if money isn't a problem, treat yourself to the monster **Fractal Axe-Fx II XL+ (€2,699)**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ An enviable collection of superb amp emulations, that sound great both clean and dirty
+ Works just as well as a multi-effects unit plugged into a real amp
+ Much cheaper than the standard Helix, without sacrificing anything vital for the average player

- Can be confusing to navigate in the heat of battle
- Overdrive and distortion effects still can't quite match the real thing

A clever and newly affordable all-in-one recording solution that might also end up replacing your gigging pedalboard

8/10

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JHS Pedals VCR Ryan Adams & Milkman

By offering a variety of effects in a single unit, might these stylish, USA-made pedals save you some valuable pedalboard space? **SYD EDWARDS** investigates...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

JHS VCR Ryan Adams

A combined boost, chorus and reverb pedal is not something you come across every day, but there are a couple of units we found that cover similar territory which might tickle your fancy; the **Electro-Harmonix Tone Tattoo** combines chorus, analogue delay and Metal Muff distortion into one unit for just under **£200**. Alternatively, going down the multi-effects route, something such as the **Line 6 AMPLIFi FX100 (£179)** would do the job – though we are now getting into the realms of a replacement pedalboard, rather than quirky little boutique units...

Not to be confused with the UK distributor, John Hornby Skewes, JHS Pedals is the brainchild of Kansas City, Missouri pedal nut Josh Scott. Scott started out specialising in mods for Tube Screamers and the like, but rapidly expanded to make his own pedals. Now employing around 25 people, JHS pedals have found their way onto the 'boards of many big artists, and that's where we come in...

JHS Pedals VCR Ryan Adams

Designed in close consultation with – and used by – the man himself, this 'Ultracolor Volume/Chorus/Reverb' houses the three functions its name would lead us to expect, plus a switchable 'lo-fi' mode that cuts low and high frequencies from the effected signal only, for a slightly more retro sound.

Each function is controlled by a single rotary knob, plus a toggle switch to select which of the three effects become active when you stomp on the master (true bypass) switch below. This has its own large red LED, while the individual effects each have their own smaller colour-coded ones; green for reverb, orange for chorus and red for volume. Power requirement is nine volts supplied via the pretty much universal centre-negative barrel plug.

JHS Pedals Milkman

Billed as a hybrid between analogue and tape delay sounds, the Milkman takes its name from co-designer Tim Marcus' boutique amp company, Milkman Sound of San Francisco. Offering various flavours of slapback delay, the Milkman also features a boost section which can be used to enhance output and warmth, or drive the input of an amp into natural breakup. The two sections are independently footswitchable, and like the VCR, power is again via a standard 9V barrel plug.

In Use

Plugging in the VCR, we opt to check out the chorus section first. Like the original Boss CE-1, both rate and depth are controlled in tandem by one knob – higher depth and lower speeds to the left and vice versa to the right. While this doesn't allow for those who want to dial in the most extreme gargling sound effects, it does everything from a bright ADT effect at zero, via a well balanced chorus at the halfway mark, to a lively (but not overly fast) pitch vibrato set at maximum. You won't find added luxuries such as an effect blend control – but then again, this wasn't an option on many classic

chorus pedals either. So far, we're rather impressed.

Flicking the toggle switch under the reverb control, the small green LED illuminates to tell us this effect is now active. The single control adjusts the effect mix only – all other parameters are factory set to Ryan's own preferences. What we do get is a high-quality medium/long digital reverb, with a short pre-delay. At 100 per cent, you hear effect only, while zero allows just the dry signal through. Our guess is that most player's 'everyday' reverb needs would be catered for between three and five on the dial – heading past this, we enter more of a 'special effects' territory, though there are some nice Peter Green-style atmospherics to be had in the upper reaches. So again, all settings are usable and the single knob makes it very simple to tweak on the fly.

Finally, we activate the volume function – potentially the least exciting and arguably not an 'effect', but a useful tool to have on your board, nonetheless. More subtle settings work excellently as a solo boost, or to balance/raise the signal of a lower output guitar, though there is enough power here to drive a clean amp into crunch territory (presuming the signal chain of guitar/pedal/amp, rather than in an effects loop). The biggest snag with using the volume section in this way would be the negative impact on both chorus and reverb effects, which are generally far happier in front of a clean amp, or in an effects loop – that said, this is still a high-end transparent boost.

Setting the VCR aside, we hook up the Milkman and set all of the pedal's delay controls to five as a starting point. We're instantly rewarded with a vintage-sounding echo/slapback that would sound great in any band mix. Rather than offering the longer delay times and infinite repeats of most other delay units, the Milkman is optimised for vintage guitar tones – something it does exceedingly well. In fact, this 'purist' approach has us reaching for a Telecaster and plugging into an old tweed combo to fully embrace the Sun Studio textures on offer.

Furthest on the left, the slap control adjusts the delay time from 'doubling' at around 50ms to distinct but (by modern standards) rapid repeats at 240ms. Next in line is the mix control, giving only dry signal at 0 per cent to a significantly boosted (virtually) 100 per cent effect at the other extreme. This is a particularly useful quality when using low settings on the EQ control – which we'll come to shortly.

Next up, the repeat control takes an approach of subtle adjustment over a carefully chosen range of function. From zero to maximum, you can choose between one and four or five repeats – though this comparatively limited range of function may not appeal to all sonic experimenters, a gigging musician may well appreciate not being a mere twist of a knob from total disaster. Short delay times with an excess of repeats can put you in danger of a 'karaoke machine'-style echo that flatters not even the finest of playing.

The final control of the delay section is labelled EQ. At zero, the top end roll-off gives a convincing 'analogue' mellowness, becoming progressively more defined and edgy as the knob is turned clockwise, culminating in a very clear (but not digital sounding) 'tape' echo. Again, the well chosen parameters of this control make it virtually impossible to set inappropriately, but there is plenty of variety on tap.

As mentioned earlier, lower settings benefit from a slightly higher mix level if you want to distinct repeats, though it is possible to get a very appealing 'always-on' reverb- style echo with the mix set lower. At the far right, the red boost control completely mutes the signal at zero, reaching unity gain at about two, then starts adding volume and richness at three. Turning the dial further to the right gives progressively more boost until the maximum setting pushes the amp into crunch territory – obviously, this will happen more quickly with humbuckers than it does on our Tele. Set between three and four, the boost gives a warmth and hint of drive that makes it quite addictive.

While the VCR might give you a headache in terms of pedal placement, this is offset by the space-, power- and cable-saving benefits of three effects in one – and the flexible switching arrangements mean you can switch them out when not required. The Milkman, on the other hand, comes with no such caveats – it's a great sounding retro delay pedal that could find a home in any rig, and could also function as a clean boost in the effects loop.

> The Milkman is a great-sounding retro delay pedal that could find a home in any rig

KEY FEATURES

JHS VCR Ryan Adams

- **PRICE** £259
- **DESCRIPTION** Combined volume/boost, chorus and reverb pedal
- **CONTROLS** Volume, chorus rate/depth (combined) and reverb mix, with individual toggle on/off switches
- **FEATURES** True bypass, switchable 'lo-fi' mode
- **DIMENSIONS** 119 x 93 x 49mm
- **CONTACT** info@jhspedals.com **www.jhspedals.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Flexible and easy to use
+ Three effects in a small footprint

– Mono operation only
– The boost function could compromise the other effects in some applications

A great sounding three-in-one solution for those who don't need a huge, high-tech pedalboard

8/10

KEY FEATURES

JHS Milkman

- **PRICE** £179
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual function analogue/tape-style delay and boost pedal
- **CONTROLS** Slap, mix, repeat, EQ and boost
- **FEATURES** Onboard booster/enhancer, true bypass
- **DIMENSIONS** 122 x 67 x 55mm

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Cool retro delay sounds
+ Ease of use
+ Dual function

– You'll need a separate pedal for longer delays

A well thought out and built unit that offers characterful old-school delay sounds in an attractive, simple to use package

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

JHS Milkman

The combined echo and boost pedal is a very unusual idea – in fact, at the time of writing, we couldn't find a direct equivalent. However, tape echo fans might want to take a look at the **Catalinbread Belle Epoch Tape Echo (£165)**. If you're willing to dig a little deeper into your pockets, the **Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man** can be had for a little over **£200**. Alternatively, the **Ibanez ES2 Echo Shifter (£116)** might be of interest, for it's ability to imitate some of the quirks of the old tape delays, such as modulation – quite interesting!

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Keeley D&M Drive

That Pedal Show's Mick and Dan team up with Robert Keeley to create their dream drive pedal. **ED OLESZKO** stacks the deck...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Analog Man King Of Tone (from $235)** is a dual-overdrive/boost with a long waiting list, for good reason, dual channels of pro quality tone and build. Alternatively, the **T-Rex Mudhoney 2 (£139)** offers dual versatile channels delivering everything from slight boost to hard rock filth at a reasonable price

For those gear heads who haven't yet caught an episode of *That Pedal Show* on YouTube, stop reading and rejoice losing the next few days/weeks catching up with some of the funniest yet most informative guitar nerd content committed to the internet.

The D&M drive is a recent addition to the ever-expanding Keeley Engineering pedal roster, designed in collaboration with *That Pedal Show* hosts and tone connoisseurs Daniel Steinhardt and Mick Taylor.

This smart, compact dual-pedal finished in sparkly 'candy apple orange' promises to cover the full gamut of drive tones from clean boosts to endless sustaining rock lead tones. Both sides of the pedal can be switched independently, or run into each other in either order, so let's plug a Strat, a Tele and a PAF-equipped Les Paul into a range of valve amps, fire up those famous blue LEDs and see how the D&M drive stacks up.

In use

Starting with the 'Mick'-inspired 'boost' channel, anyone expecting a midrange bluesy boost and touch-sensitive mild overdrive tones has come to the right place.

There's a huge amount of level boost available, pushing a clean Fender amp into a mid-rich overdrive that perfectly complements a slightly 'mid scooped' vintage Strat voice. Texas blues tones are so righteous that owners of certain famous green and gold pedals might consider retiring their prized vintage units.

Winding up the gain up rewards you with a sensitive dynamic overdrive, a quick pick attack and uncompressed feel. Combined with a slight attenuation of both the low end and top end, it delivers a hugely addictive, vocal, mid-heavy tone. Boosting an already overdriven American tweed amp with a Les Paul rewards you perfect voice for country tinged Americana riffs and vintage-voiced Southern lead tones.

Switching to the Dan-inspired 'drive' channel, again there is a hefty level hike on tap, combined with a versatile range of rich, valve-like overdriven tones. Running a Telecaster into a clean, high-headroom valve amp with the pedal's drive control set low and the volume high gives a sweet, neutral EQ boost, softer under the fingers than the boost side yet equally musical and inspiring. Winding up the gain control and returning to the Les Paul quite simply unleashes a beast named 'rock' that dwells inside this pedal!

Running it into a valve amp on the edge of breakup gives a lead tone to die for. It's dynamic, with a smooth pick attack and flattering sustain that simultaneously retains your guitars voice while enhancing it with a harmonically rich overdrive that feels fantastically liquid under the fingertips. Unexpected amounts of thick, warm distortion await, yet notes in complex chords still ring out clearly and turning down your guitar's controls or picking lighter gives a clearer feel, which is great for alt-rock, modern blues riffs and singing solos.

Turning the gain above noon and boosting the carefully voiced tone control to about two o'clock unleashes a voice that's pure sleaze-rock. Perfectly EQ'd for a huge 90s riff tone, simply wind up the gain further for tight, heavy-gain tones.

The Keeley D&M drive's two sides offer distinctly versatile and hugely useful personalities

It's ideal for Foo Fighters riffs or even alternative metal.

Placed after the drive side, the boost channel gives a great volume boost for solo passages, cutting some low end muddiness and boosting the exact midrange frequencies needed to push your solo through a busy band mix.

Flicking the slightly flimsy micro switch to place the boost before the drive circuit pushes the drive circuit but makes the tone fuller and broader, upping the gain and compression giving endless singing sustain and blooming, harmonically rich lead tones. Excellent stuff!

While some dual pedals give you little more than twin variations on a theme, the Keeley D&M drive's two sides offer distinctly versatile and hugely useful personalities. Some dirt pedals really excel at low-gain boost or transparent overdrive, others at being a midrange boost for an already cooking amp. Others still function best as a high-gain distortion into a clean, high-headroom amp. Between the two sides of this pedal, the D&M drive pulls off the rare trick of absolutely nailing all of the above, whatever your gain needs. It also works well with a wide variety of guitars and amps, and all in a compact and lightweight orange package so bright you'll never loose it on stage – indeed, the knobs even glow in the dark!

With some clever switching and the use of TRS cables, both pedal sides can even be switched and used independently via a pedal switching system such as TheGigRig's G2 (no surprise as Mr Steinhardt is the man behind the high-end switching system company).

The downsides? Given that this is such a versatile pedal full of outstanding tones that could conceivably be the only drive pedal a player would need for a gig or jam session, it's a shame that it requires a nine-volt PSU and can't be battery powered. The position of that 9V input might also cause problems with the angled jack plugs on some patch cables. We'd also like to see some sort of internal presence control on the boost side for those players who like to control the sparkling high frequencies of their boosted tones.

Nevertheless, this is a hugely versatile and useful boost/OD/distortion pedal worthy of space on anyone's pedalboard.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Compact and hugely versatile with a wide gain range
+ Two distinct, well judged tones that complement each other

- No battery power
- An internal presence control for the boost channel would be nice

A super-versatile gain pedal full of top-quality tones that could conceivably replace two or even three others on your board – if it ran on battery power, it would be perfect!

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Keeley D&M Drive

- **PRICE** £229
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual overdrive/distortion/boost pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Independent level, gain, and tone controls for each channel. Bypass footswitches. Selectable pedal stacking order switch
- **FEATURES** Independent or stackable drive and boost channels. Independent channel selectivity when used with a pedal switching system via use of TRS cables
- **DIMENSIONS** 117 x 92 x 51mm
- **CONTACT** Andertons 01483 456777
  andertons.co.uk
  robertkeeley.com

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Circa 1972. All original. Fantastic condition. Big Vintage sound. With non-original hard case. More photos and info online.

New
£845

Faith FVHG Hi Gloss Venus
Electro-Acoustic. Solid Engelmann Spruce Top. Solid Rosewood Back and Sides. Shadow Performer Pickup system. Hard Case.

New
£835

Faith FVBMB Venus Blood Moon
Electro-Acoustic. Solid AAA Grade Indonesian Trembesi Top, Back and Sides. Shadow Pickup system. Hard Case.

New
£1,036

Fender FSR Classic 69 Pink Paisley
Fender Special Run. Classic Pink Paisley finish Telecaster. Vintage Style Pickups. Silm C Shape Neck. 1 piece Maple body.

Pre-owned
£2,499

Fender Custom Shop Relic '64 Jazz
Made in 1999. Best Relic'ing we have seen! Fantastic tone and sound. More photos online. Comes with Docs and Hard Case.

New
£2,359

Rickenbacker 4003
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New
£2,599

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New
£1,699

Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo
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Pre-owned
£1,299

Fender 'The Strat' 1980
Very collectable. Some say the ultimate stratocaster! 9 pickup combinations. X1 Bridge Pickup. Great condition. More photos online.

New
£2,869

Gretsch G6120-59 LTV QM LTD
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Pre-owned
£1,479

Yamaha AEX1500
Martin Taylor Model. Made in 2004. Fantastic condition. Natural Blonde Gloss finish. Floating Humbucker & Piezo System. Case.

Pre-owned
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Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe

The UREI 1176 compressor is a studio classic that sounds incredible on guitars. Handily, Origin Effects has created a stompbox tribute. **HUW PRICE** feels the squeeze...

Origin's Cali76 pedals boast an enviable list of big name owners, but the original units didn't leave much room on a pedalboard. In a sensible move, the UK effects maker has opted to discontinue the old big box range and introduce new compact versions.

The circuitry has been miniaturized with surface-mount components and stacked circuit boards, but the Compact Series Cali76 still features high-current, low-noise, fully discrete Class-A circuitry with low-noise transistors for true FET compression. There's no room for a battery, but Origin specifies a regulated centre-negative supply. The Cali76 can run at nine volts but 18 is recommended for increased headroom, cleaner processing, and for handling higher signal levels, such as active pickups.

In Use

There's a lot of controls here for a compressor, so let's run through them. 'In' increases preamp gain, raising the signal to the compression threshold and beyond, with the jewel light turning from red to orange to indicate the onset of compression. 'Out' sets the output level to match or boost the bypassed level, and ratio sets the gain reduction – here, the light turns yellow when reduction reaches 27dB. Attack determines how quickly the compressor reacts and release determines the amount of time the compression stays active.

These controls all feature on original 1176s, but the dry control takes the Deluxe to another level. Studio mix engineers use parallel compression to combine heavily compressed and uncompressed signals to enjoy extreme compression effects without losing natural dynamics. Dry lets you do just that.

Studio compression can enhance subtle details and clarity with guitar. The elements you may like best about your tone – such as woodiness in the low mids or a sweet sheen in the upper mids – can get swamped in a mix. Good compressors will bring those qualities back to the fore to let them be used as tone enhancers, and the Cali76 does this superbly.

Compared with the big box Cali76-TX version, we find that the little fella is very slightly clearer, less coloured and more versatile. It's an outstanding compressor that seems to work with you rather than fight you and almost every time you switch it off, it's to the detriment of your tone.

> It's an outstanding compressor that seems to work with you rather than fight you

Compressors divide guitarists, but much depends on what you expect from them. You can use them to add a punchy and percussive thump to funk parts, squish out all the attack and decay for near-infinite sustain, mimic rectifier sag with even the stiffest and spikiest amps, or simply smooth out the unevenness of a badly set up guitar or poor playing.

Stompbox compressors that can do all of the above are scarce. If your requirements extend to low noise and minimal tonal colouration, the list becomes even shorter, but the Cali76 Deluxe is undoubtedly at the top and it does more besides.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Empress Effects Compressor (£249)** uses the same FET topology and has an almost identical control layout as the Cali76. If you feel you might prefer valves, the **Effectrode PC-2A (£259)** is an optical compressor based on the 1176's predecessor, the LA-2A

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

- + Outstanding audio quality and excellent build
- + Powerful yet effective controls and innovative metering
- + Handles subtle and strong compression equally well
- + Dry/compression mixing
- – Power supply operation only

An all-round compressor with pristine tone and a full range of compression and limiting effects for guitarists and bassists

10/10

KEY FEATURES

Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe

- **DESCRIPTION** Fully discrete FET compressor pedal running on 9V/18V external power. 'Signal-conditioning' bypass. Made in the UK
- **PRICE** £279
- **CONTROLS** Dry, out, in, ratio, attack, release
- **OPTIONS** Three-knob Cali76 Compact (£199), Cali76 Compact Bass (£279)
- **CONTACT** Origin Effects 01376 553016 **www.origineffects.com**

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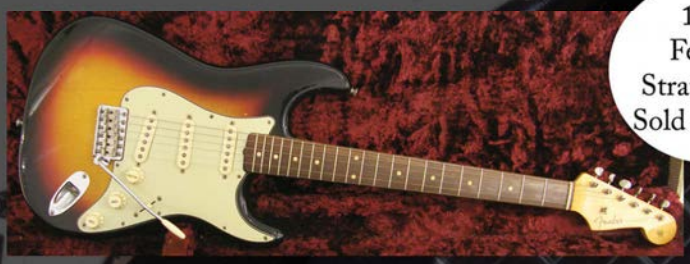

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Orange Kongpressor

The amp giant adds an optical compressor to its growing range of effects pedals – **RICHARD PURVIS** finds out if this Orange is juicy enough

Orange is making a real effort with this whole stompbox thing, you know. Its pedals don't look like all the others, and don't work like them either – they're thoughtfully designed units that solve very specific problems. So you might not need one… but if you do, it should be damned good at its job.

This one's a compressor. They couldn't call it the Orange Crush because they already have an amp line of that name… so naturally, they named it after the hand-grip of a giant ape instead. Specifically, it's an optical compressor – and before you ask, no, the EU hasn't changed the rules about cadmium again, but we're assured the optocoupler used here is made without the toxic metal.

This is a solid lump of hardware with a mean-looking bar across the middle to protect the controls. We love the artwork on the enclosure, although relocating King Kong from New York to London on a pedal made in China is taking a bit of a liberty.

As well as output level and 'squash' (compression), there are dials for attack and release speed – which will be familiar to anyone who's worked with studio compressors. The fifth control is an active treble booster/cutter. See what we mean about fussy tonehounds?

In Use

In the default position of everything set halfway, compression is subtle, with no unnatural thumping or squishing as it hits, and no over-eager surging as it retreats below the threshold. It's the sort of flattering effect you could be tempted to leave on all the time, as your bypass tone can sound a tad flat in comparison.

This isn't a one-trick monkey, though. Turn the squash control right down, and you can use the Kongpressor as a clean boost, with up to 12dB on offer. Conversely, if you push the compression well past halfway the effect gets very obvious indeed – and this is where the other three knobs become important.

Starting with a super-slow attack that lets plenty of spiky transients through, we wind it up until just enough is being caught to make things easy on the ear. Go too far and you'll rob your sound of its natural brightness, but the chime knob can dial extra-sweet treble back in. What's more, you can easily push this further to add a generous sparkle in the style of a Vox Top Boost circuit.

> It's the sort of flattering effect you could be tempted to leave on all the time

Release gives you fine control over how quickly notes swell when the compression recedes. This really is studio-level precision that most of us probably won't need. But, if you're geeky enough to want it, you'll be delighted with how well it works.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE…

The **Keeley C4 Compressor (£199)** is the four-knob version of a boutique legend, while the **Xotic SP Compressor (£160)** is a simpler, more compact option. You might also consider the **Pigtronix Philosopher's Tone Micro (£129)**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Subtle, natural, tone-enhancing compression
+ It would be really handy to be able to blend in some clean boost and fine-tune the treble response
- There's too many knobs for some of us to work with

A fine-sounding compressor for those who want complete control over the shape of every note they play

9/10

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Orange Kongpressor

- **PRICE** £119
- **DESCRIPTION** Compressor pedal. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Volume, squash, chime, release speed, attack speed
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass, powered by 9-12V mains supply or battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 130x95x65mm
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Electro-Harmonix Canyon & Blurst

Two new eccentric and otherworldly entries into the Electro-Harmonix canon. **SYD EDWARDS** gets to grips...

KEY FEATURES

Electro-Harmonix Canyon

- **PRICE** £132
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-mode delay/looper pedal. Made in the USA
- **CONTROLS** FX level, delay, mode (11 positions) feedback, tap/divide. All controls have secondary functions
- **FEATURES** Internal tails on switch, external footswitch socket for tap function, EHX 9.6V adapter (supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 115 x 70 x 54mm

Electro-Harmonix Blurst

- **PRICE** £130
- **DESCRIPTION** Modulating filter effect. Made in the USA
- **CONTROLS** Vol, blend, resonance, rate, range. 3x 3-position toggle switches for shape, tap/divide and exp mode for an external treadle. Onboard tap tempo switch included
- **FEATURES** Socket to connect external expression pedal, EHX 9V adapter (included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 102 x 121 x 89mm
- **CONTACT** Electro-Harmonix **www.ehx.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **TC Electronic Flashback (£165)** has a similar depth to the Canyon, and allows TonePrint editing, while the **Line 6 DL4 (£185)** is the default option for multi-delay and looper effects. If weird synths are your thing the **DigiTech Dirty Robot** offers waveforms, envelopes and filters galore. If you want some true weirdness, however, the **Earthquaker Devices Bit Commander (£179)** offers serious scope for sonic tomfoolery

EHX has been responsible for many weird and wonderful sounds over the last near-half century, from the Electric Mistress to the HOG and everything in between. The latest fruits of the New York firm's labour are the Canyon delay/looper and the Blurst, which is described as an 'analog low pass filter'.

At first glance, the Canyon is a standard multi-function delay pedal with 10 types on tap, plus a looper in the 11th position. However thanks to a small tap/divide control, you can set delay time on the fly, and cycle through different rhythmic subdivisions, with the LED indicator changing colour to reflect your choice. But there's more – hold down the tap/divide button and you'll enter 'secondary knob mode', where further tweakable parameters are opened up for each delay type. Once you exit this mode, the settings will remain until you go back in, even when you turn it off.

The Blurst, meanwhile, is effectively a cross between a Uni-Vibe, phaser and touch wah, but with some more extreme potential under the hood. Controls for range, rate, filter, tap time and shape can be found on the device, while hooking up an expression pedal allows real-time control more outlandish effects. The resonance knob makes the effect more 'chewy', while rate regulates the sweep, and range controls the frequency band in which the effect operates.

In Use

The Canyon's modes are simple to operate and very usable – from the standard echo (with up to 3 seconds delay time) to more esoteric fare such as mod and reverse, and of course a Deluxe Memory Man. The most interesting option however, is S/H – Sample & Hold – which is like a kind of monophonic looper controlled by your picking strength, with adjustable sensitivity.

The looper is pretty basic, allowing up to a minute of recording, with the usual overdub/undo/redo options. The Canyon will store all loops until you double click the footswitch, although we noticed a bit of latency creeping in by the fourth overdub.

With the controls set at 12 o'clock, it's actually pretty easy to dial in some interesting sounds on the Blurst, but going further makes things less predictable. The resonance knob, for example, is considerably louder at the top of its sweep than the bottom, but this is where the global volume control comes in handy.

In many ways, the Blurst feels like being taken back to your first effects endeavours, where trial and error is the order of the day. Combining the shape toggle with the range control is the quickest way to some cool 'non-guitar' sounds, and once you get beyond the middle third of the knob's range, we're into definite synth-y territory. Controlling the sound might be a struggle at first, but in truth the best way to approach the Blurst is to ride the knobs by feel until you get somewhere interesting!

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

ELECTRO-HARMONIX CANYON

+ Quality sounds with loads of options
+ Excellent tweakability from the secondary functions
- Mono operation only
- The looper is a bit basic

If you need a versatile delay pedal, this has to be a serious contender

8/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

ELECTRO-HARMONIX BLURST

+ Great potential for creative sounds
+ Highly flexible with bags of features
- Takes a while to get to grips with it
- Some may find gimmicky

A very unusual pedal, with potential to inspire a type of sonic exploration usually reserved for keyboard players

7/10

A choice of three H9 pedals to suit your needs and budget.

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Seymour Duncan Forza Overdrive

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

In the ever expanding drive pedal market, this latest addition from Seymour Duncan might be one of the most versatile yet. **SYD EDWARDS** takes it for a spin...

KEY FEATURES

Seymour Duncan Forza Overdrive

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive/boost pedal with onboard 3-band EQ. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, drive, bass, middle, treble
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V battery or 9/18V DC power
- **DIMENSIONS** 124 x 66 x 37mm
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550033 **www.seymourduncan.com**

Seymour Duncan's move from pickup maker to pedal pusher is gathering pace all the time, and this latest US-built box will be of interest to Tube Screamer aficionado.

The benefit of TS- or Boss Super Overdrive-style pedals (beyond the standard gain-boosting requirements) is the extra signal shaping they offer, allowing you to control the low end and mids more precisely. This in turn spawned a large modification industry for people who wanted the control, but felt that the basic pedals had tone-sucking properties and craved more clarity and versatility. The Forza incorporates pretty much every permutation of these modded drives, with its three-band EQ, plus level and drive controls. Add in a true bypass and 9/18-volt operation and we are very interested to have a listen...

In Use

Plugged into a clean amp with all the controls set at 12 o'clock, we hear a well proportioned drive, similar to a quality modded TS. It's very transparent – no lost low end or accentuated mid hump, though the top end is pleasantly controlled. If you do want an old school 'treble-boost' rasp, the level control can certainly give that, with its 37dB boost capability...

> There's a varied palette of usable tones anyway, but the three-band EQ is the ace in the hole

The gain and level controls provide a varied palette of usable tones on their own, but the three-band EQ is the ace in the hole. The controls for this are smaller and therefore protected against accidental knocks, and it's gratifying to see that this is not a generic tone stack, but a cut and boost with centre detents and carefully chosen frequencies.

The bass (B) control offers +/- 11db at 90Hz, great for thickening up the low end or taming a rumbling cab. Meanwhile, mid (M) cuts and boosts at 750Hz – much friendlier on the ears than the default 1k of some tone stacks. Treble (T) is centred at 2.1Hz – more of a high mid than a treble control, but an ideal frequency to be able to manipulate, either boosted to slice through the mix, or cut to smooth out jagged edges, particularly on the treble strings. Interestingly, T allows a slightly increased 12dB cut or boost.

Whether used as a standalone drive, or as a booster for your amp, the Forza is going to satisfy. Its simple, well thought out design and fuss free operation will doubtless see it grace many a pedalboard.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Wampler Euphoria Overdrive (£179)** offers switchable voicings and a low/high-style EQ stack. The **LovePedal Hermida Dover Drive (£155)** is a solid-state take on the celebrated Tube Driver, but it has just one tone control and internal 'bias' pot for changing drive textures

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Simple, well thought out layout
+ Versatile tone-shaping options
– It's not the cheapest drive pedal out there

An easy to use and extremely versatile drive that's suitable for a variety of sonic applications

9/10

LEVEL
TREBLE
GAIN
BASS
White Scream
OVERDRIVE
NEMPHASIS
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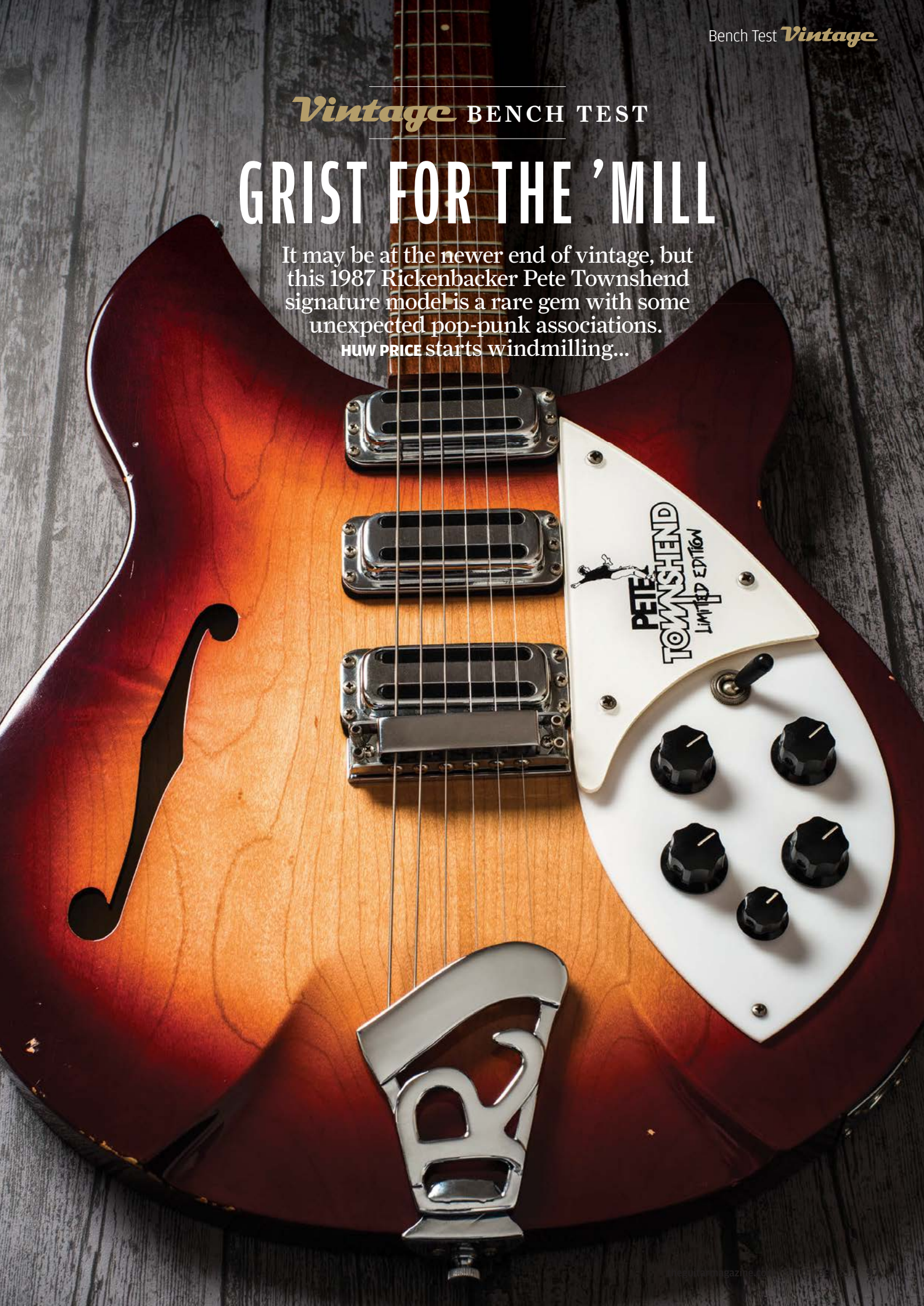
Vintage BENCH TEST

GRIST FOR THE 'MILL

It may be at the newer end of vintage, but this 1987 Rickenbacker Pete Townshend signature model is a rare gem with some unexpected pop-punk associations. **HUW PRICE** starts windmilling...



Above **The Rickenbacker's three 'toaster top' pickups are controlled by a fairly eccentric switching system**
Opposite top left **The neck is a sandwich construction of regular maple flanking a strip of thermally-treated 'retified' maple**
Opposite top right **The Fireglo finish is echoed on the neck and headstock, as is traditional with Rickys**
Opposite bottom **There are a few scratches and scuffs on the guitar's two-piece maple body**

Compared to our usual Vintage Bench Test subjects this guitar is a bit of a pup. Some might not even consider a guitar made in 1987 – 30 September to be exact – as vintage at all. But the 30-year rule applies for classic cars, so we're applying it to guitars in the same spirit!

It's rare, too, because Rickenbacker only did a run of 250 1998PT guitars back in the day, and the demand was so great, they were all pre-ordered before Rickenbacker even had the chance to publicise them in the catalogue. In fact, the combined list of gear that Townshend has used and endorsed over the years can't be too far off the 250 mark itself!

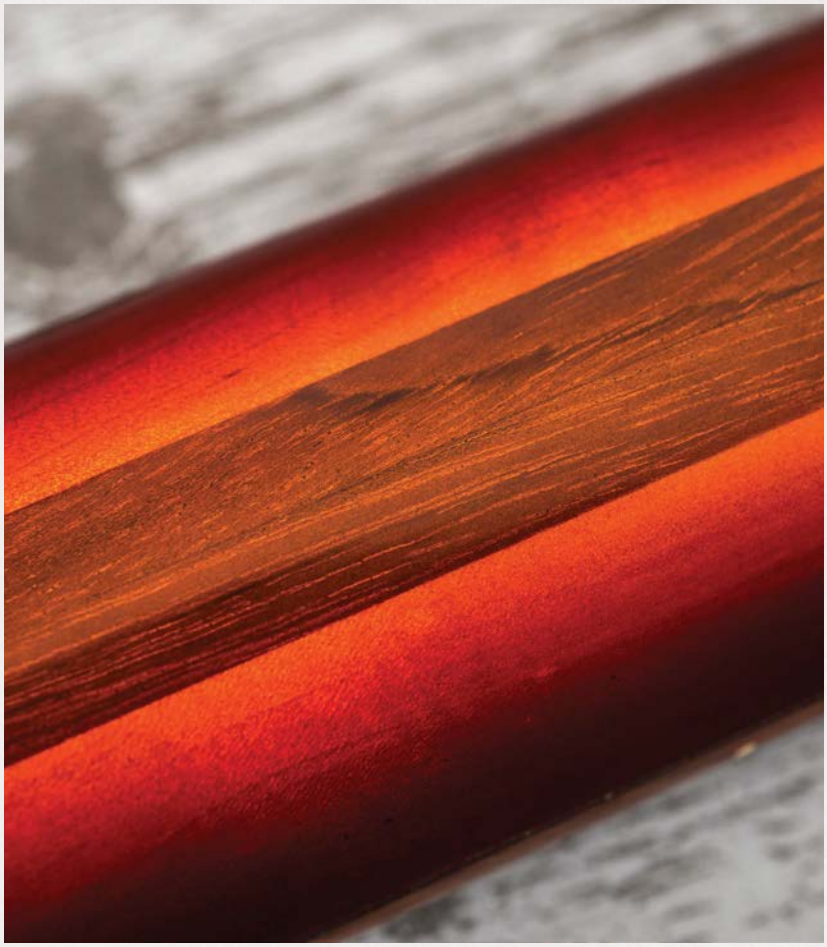
Rickenbacker only made 250 Townshend signature guitars back in the day

This particular example was the 94th 1998PT made and once belonged to Mark Hoppus from Blink-182. He subsequently gave it to his friend and producer, the late Jerry Finn. The guitar clearly saw a lot of use with various punk bands, but it's now easing into middle age as part of a Pete Townshend-themed private collection.

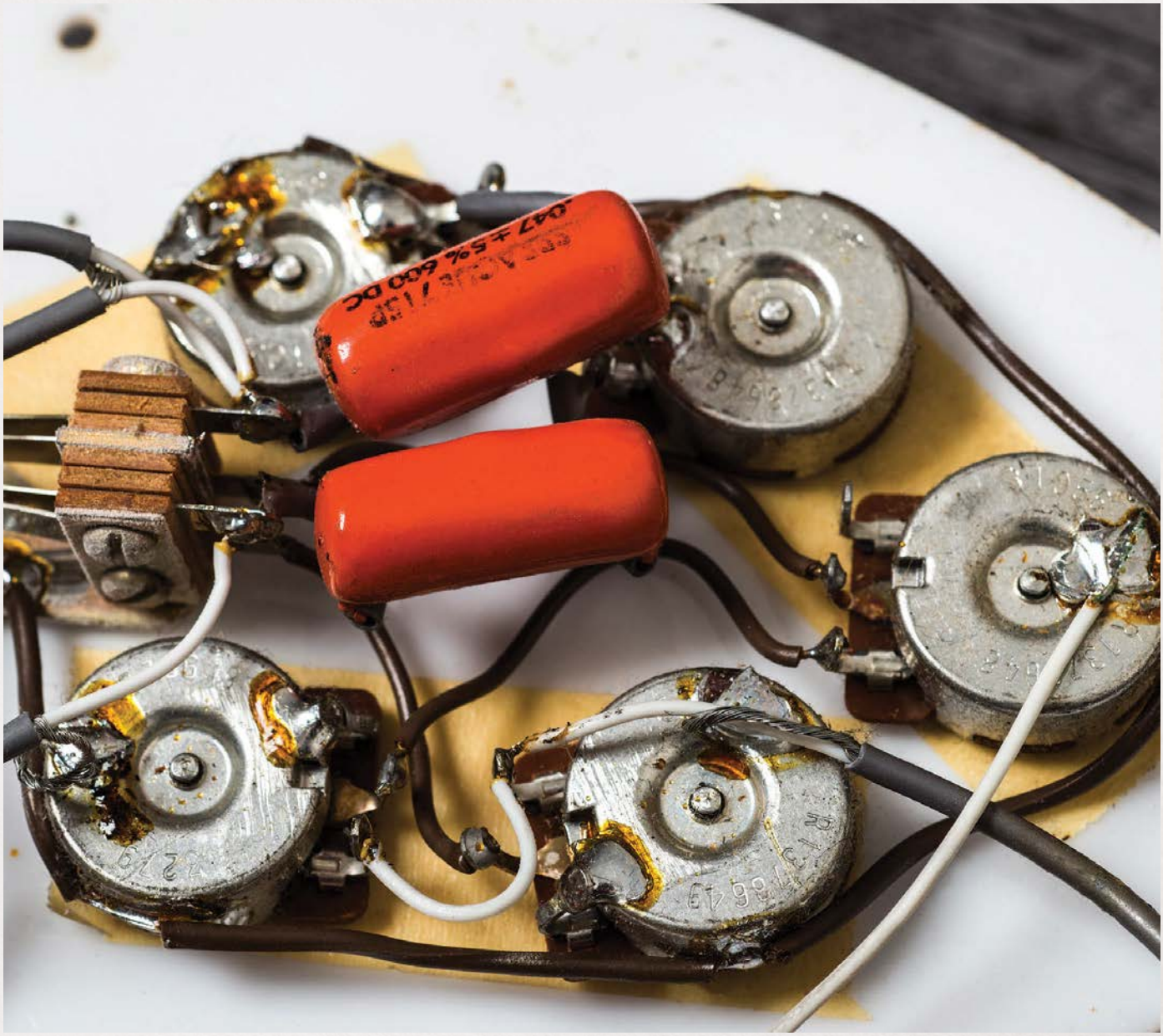
The model numbers get confusing because Rickenbacker's original UK importer, Rose Morris, used its own model designations and specified violin-style f-holes. So, in the US this would have been a 340 model with Rickenbacker's usual 'slash'-shaped soundholes.

Rickenbacker has always had its own way of doing things and – Townshend's tendencies notwithstanding – the term 'if it ain't broke' seems to be the company's guiding principle. The approach to building can be summarised as 'inside out and occasionally back to front'.

The body begins as two blocks of maple joined together and routed to create pickup recesses and sound



Rickenbacker



chambers. The back plates are then glued onto the routed blocks and the outer shape is cut. This 'inside out' procedure is the opposite of the way that most manufacturers approach chambered bodies and Rickenbackers of this type are closer to being hollowed out solidbodies than hollowbodies with a centre block – such as Gibson's ES-335 and the like.

The neck on this guitar is a sandwich construction of regular maple with a darker strip of 'retified' maple running down the centre. In case you're wondering, 'retification' is the term Rickenbacker uses for thermally treated wood. So roasted or torrefied timber may be flavour of the month in modern guitar circles, but Rickenbacker has been using the stuff for decades because its enhanced stability keeps necks straight and true.

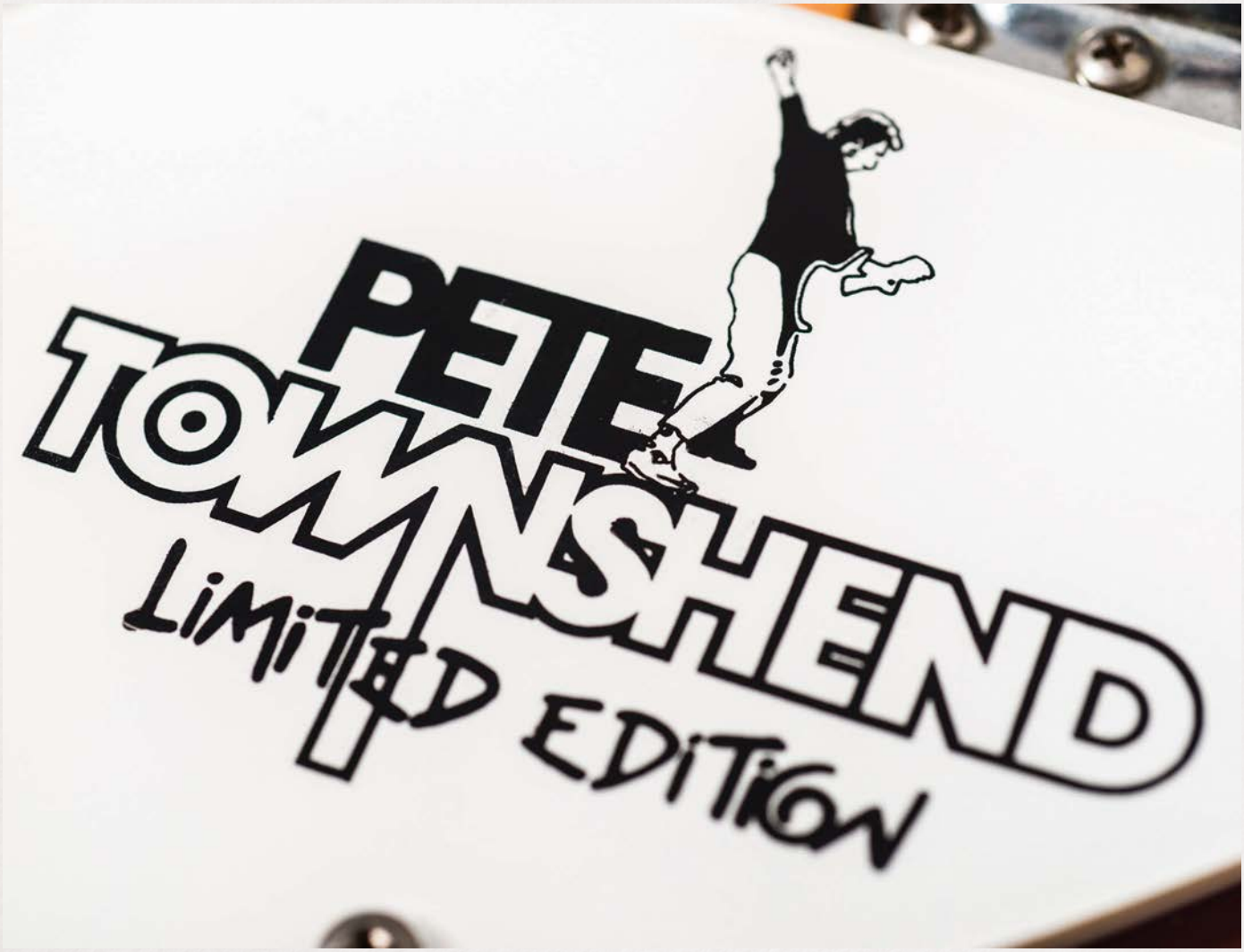
The rosewood fingerboard is about 7mm thick and it's gloss finished like the neck and body. There are several chips and dents but it's all minor and superficial stuff that adds to the vibe of the Fireglo finish. Rickenbacker hardware and fittings are as iconic as any other manufacturer's, and of course there's the toaster top pickups and two-tier pickguard. The upper level has the 'Pete Townshend Limited Edition' graphic, but there's a plain one in the case that certainly looks like it might have been fitted to a guitar at some point.

Rickenbacker has used thermally treated wood for decades, because it keeps necks straight and true

In Use

Considering the importance of Rickenbacker guitars in shaping the sound of rock and pop in the 60s and the 80s, it has always struck me as odd that they are not more widely used. Stranger still, this writer has

Opposite **The neck has no back angle, and is actually pitched slightly forward, giving the guitar a playing experience that requires some getting used to**
Above **The Rickenbacker's wiring harness features volume and tone pots for each pickup, plus a mixer pot at the bottom**



Above **Just 250 of these guitars were made, and all were snapped up on preorder before it even made it into the catalogue**
Opposite **Removing the truss rod cover reveals Rickenbacker's unusual dual-truss rod set-up**

never actually owned a Rickenbacker, despite idolising a whole list of players who have used them famously over the years. So, this is going to be something of a voyage into the unknown.

Picking it up, the geometry is a bit unusual because the neck has no back angle relative to the body and doesn't even come in square. Instead it has a slightly forward tilt, which means the strings are closer to the top surface of the body at the neck than at the bridge. All three pickups are more or less equidistant from the strings, but to achieve that the bridge pickup is set lower than the neck and middle pickups.

The entire neck is clear of the body and the slim depth remains consistent along its length. The fingerboard is also quite narrow – roughly 3mm narrower than most guitars – so the strings are quite closely spaced from nut to bridge and picking needs to be accurate. The general feel of the guitar may be unfamiliar, but it's slick, fast and enjoyable. It's also very easy to play, and Townshend has said that playing Rickenbackers allowed him to devise chord shapes that would have dislocated his hand with other guitar necks.

This guitar sounds glorious unplugged. It sustains, rings and chimes like an acoustic

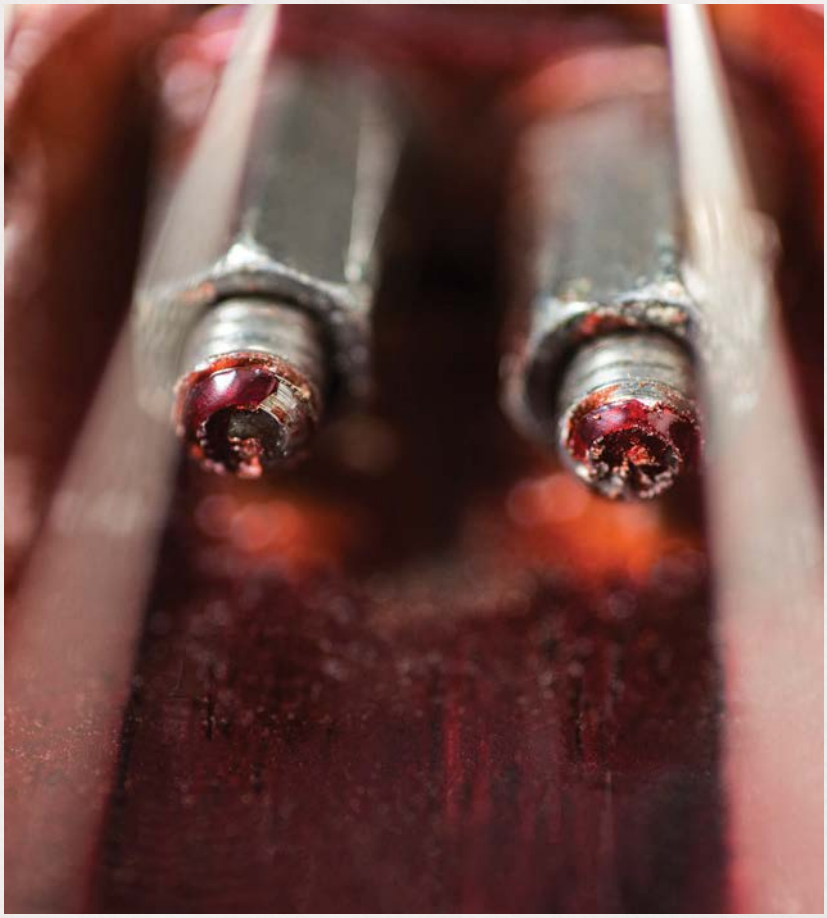
This guitar sounds glorious unplugged. It sustains, rings and chimes – a bit like the easiest playing acoustic imaginable. It helps that the intonation is superb encouraging you to slide chords up and down the neck and mix fretted notes with open strings. It's so easy to understand how the inherent tonal qualities of Rickenbackers must have influenced the development of Townshend's playing style.

The controls need figuring out. With the switch down, it's bridge pickup only, which corresponds with the two large knobs closest to the tailpiece – volume on the bottom and tone on top. In the up position you get the neck and middle pickups – but only if the smallest knob is turned fully anti-clockwise. Turn it fully clockwise and it acts like a master volume for both pickups – despite the fact that those pickups already share a volume and tone control.

The middle position offers a combination of all three pickups and it's where the real magic happens. It's a fully rounded and full frequency sound that's at its best with just a bit of the neck and middle pickup faded out. Once you've found the blend, the pickup selector provides three distinct and balanced tones.

As tempting as it might be to try and get through a Rickenbacker review without using the word 'jangle', it would be squandering the most appropriate adjective. This sound is an archetype of electrified guitar music – it's like a Gretsch without the woolliness, combined with the sweetest sounding Telecaster and a hint of harpsichord thrown in.

Playing through an old Vox AC10 takes you back to the golden age of chiming indie bands. Forget all the blues-rock stuff, this guitar is all about arpeggios, suspensions and power chords. It's punky, poppy and powerful – but also undeniably pretty. On balance we think we might prefer a two-pickup 330, because it's hard to avoid tapping the middle pickup as you play, but you do wonder if the hazy midrange of the middle position would sound quite as special as the third pickup does here.



KEY FEATURES

1987 Rickenbacker Pete Townshend Signature

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Chambered maple body, glued-in laminated maple neck with rosewood fingerboard, dot markers and 21 frets
- **HARDWARE,** Kluson-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x 'toaster top' pickups, two volumes, two tones, neck/middle fader, three way selector switch
- **FINISH** Fireglo
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 40mm at nut, 49mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 20mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 46.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.1kg/6.8lbs

Classic Combinations

1960 FENDER TWIN & CUSTOM TELECASTER

From a sleepy, picturesque corner of Lincolnshire, Norman Mitchell's Old Hat Guitars has long been supplying players in the know with high-quality vintage gear. The shop downstairs is not even the half of it – upstairs in his museum, Norman curates a dazzling collection of rare vintage guitars and amplifiers that anyone can see, provided they support a charity close to his heart.

"Anybody can come up here if they make a donation to Cancer Research," says Norman. "And if it's a substantial contribution or I like 'em they can play anything as well! It's a muso's bolthole..."

In the first in a new series in which we'll be showcasing some of the highlights of Norman's collection, this month's star pairing is a 1960 Fender Custom Telecaster and Twin, both of which have been restored to their original appearance after previous owners had made some ill-advised modifications.

"The guitar was restored by JW Black at Fender," Norman reveals. "I restored the amplifier to how it should look visually. When I found it in America it had been painted black by its previous owner. It had a torn fretcloth. But having looked at it in its sad condition for so long, I thought, this has got to go back to how it was. It was only when I stripped the blonde covering off that I discovered it was number three of the first production run by Fender in 1960.

"The amplifier had more power than the speaker technology at the time was able to cope with. Everybody modified them with JBLs, otherwise the speakers wouldn't last a day in normal use. But we've had some fun with it – if you turn the treble up full with a Telecaster it will slice bacon in the next road. There's so much cut on it. But it sounds great."

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TONY BACON

Tony Bacon writes books about guitars and guitarists: more at tonybacon.co.uk. His latest is The Gibson 335 Guitar Book (Backbeat), the story of the great semi-solids.

THE CREAM OF THE CROP

While The Beatles had stopped playing live and had retreated into the studio, Cream were still putting in the hard yards. **TONY BACON** investigates the other side of music in 1967...

It was rather hard to avoid all the fuss about the 50th anniversary of The Beatles seminal *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in recent months. Thing is, most of the was focus on the drugs and the psychedelia, the funny clothes – not so much the music. People forget that by 1967 The Beatles had stopped playing live and were spending all their time fiddling in the studio, hence the dense, ornate nature of the album. However, they were The Beatles – the reality for every other pro rock band in 1967 was that they had very little time for studio tweaking, as they had to gig as hard as they could.

Take Cream, for example. When Eric 'God' Clapton, Jack 'Genius' Bruce, and Ginger 'Battering ram' Baker hooked up, they all brought along years of experience trudging eight days a week up and down the various clubs and dives of Britain. At first Cream was no different, despite the psych sheen and sizeable hype. Eric played a Les Paul until the early months of '67, when he got an SG Standard, and Jack continued to use a Fender Bass VI. They had the SG and VI painted in Summer Of Love-style by a couple of Dutch artists, and while Eric liked his – he wrote in his autobiography that the daubs turned his SG "into a psychedelic fantasy" – Jack was unhappy with the sticky finish of his VI and moved to a Gibson EB-3.

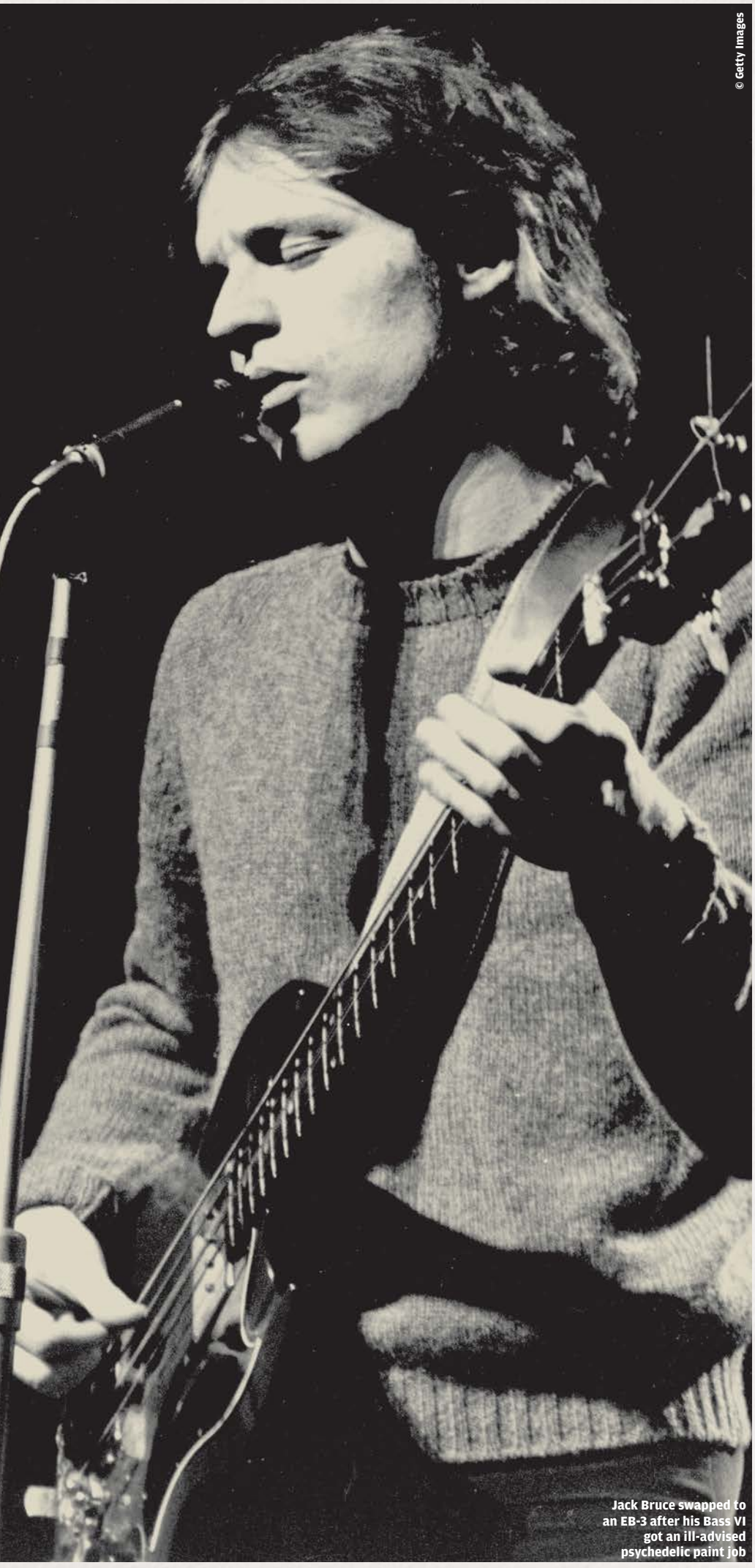
"This guy would get excited and rush on stage waving his gun if the music was particularly good"

Their gear saw them through constant gigging in late '66 and into '67. I asked Jack once about some of those experiences. He told me they had an Austin Westminster band car, into which they shoehorned driver-roadie Ben Palmer, the three of them, two Marshall stacks, and the drums. "The Marquee was good, the 100 Club was good," Jack said, "but the Flamingo was the hip place. There were a lot of US service people used to come there for the all-nighters, and actually it was unlicensed, like all the clubs. So you had to go up to the bar, ask for a coke, and rub the side of your nose knowingly. They'd charge you five quid for a coke with mostly Scotch." There was gangster involvement, too, which added a certain edge. "A guy called Ronnie Chambers used to look after the Flamingo, and he'd get excited sometimes and rush on stage waving his gun about if the music was particularly good."

I told Jack I'd seen a contract for a gig in Yorkshire in late '66 for £75. "That was pretty good bread for then," he said, a little surprised. "I remember the first big-money gig we got with Graham Bond, a few years earlier, I think it was Newcastle or Durham University or something, we got £40. We thought 'Wow, we've hit the big time! A few of those and we can retire!' And bear in mind that people were probably earning a quarter of that as a decent weekly wage. But Cream wasn't making very good money at first from gigs. That came much later."

The first time Jack went abroad was with Cream to Copenhagen, and then the to States. An encounter before their gig at the Fillmore in San Francisco in summer '67, sticks out as a moment where he felt very much a tourist. "We did a little soundcheck, and my habit somewhere new is to hit a bar, to get a feel the place. I walked around the corner in my gold boots and purple cloak, whatever it was, thinking nothing of it, into the first bar. Full of working men, all eyes on me. I walked up to the jukebox and put on Albert King, and they all relaxed a bit. I started talking to them, and soon as they heard the accent they were cool. But there was a little moment there. Should I cancel the gig? Cancel my life?"

Cream made a good 1967 album, too – *Disraeli Gears* – but in quite different circumstances to The Beatles, squeezing the odd session into that heavy gigging schedule. "And we just never had time to write as a band. The closest we got, I guess, was *Sunshine Of Your Love*, where I had the riff and then Eric came up with the turnaround. We should have written more as a band. Who knows, maybe we would have continued?"



© Getty Images

Jack Bruce swapped to an EB-3 after his Bass VI got an ill-advised psychedelic paint job

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'64 EPIPHONE FT-120 EXCELLENTE

A stunning Kalamazoo-made acoustic that proved Epiphone was capable of occasionally getting one over on its more fashionable sister brand, Gibson

In the first half of the 20th century, Epiphone was Gibson's closest rival, especially in the archtop market. When Epiphone struggled in the aftermath of World War II, Gibson's then parent company – Chicago Musical Instruments (CMI) – jumped at the chance to acquire the competition.

Gibson was very protective of the territories its existing dealers operated in at the time, but there were many other shops in these areas that wanted to stock Gibson guitars. The Epiphone acquisition was CMI's way of getting around this without causing internal strife with the Gibson hierarchy.

Production of Epiphone guitars was moved to the Kalamazoo factory, and many of them were made using the same parts as Gibsons. As a result, CMI was able to provide other retailers "almost-a-Gibson" Epiphones without aggravating Gibson's dealer network.

For the most part, Epiphone instruments very closely mirrored their Gibson counterparts. But everything changed when Epiphone introduced the FT-120 Excellente in 1963, a high-end flat top that outpaced even some of the top-of-the-line Gibsons.

The Excellente was a high-end flat top that outpaced even some top-of-the-line Gibsons

The Excellente is a square-shouldered dread' with a solid spruce top and Brazilian rosewood back and sides, which separated it from Gibson's offerings of the time. The fretboard and bridge were both ebony, with mother-of-pearl cloud inlays – a calling card of Epiphone's premier De Luxe archtop.

Adding to its mystique, the Excellente's oversized, tortoiseshell pickguard features an elaborate engraving. It's outfitted with gold hardware and a rectangular pearl inlay with a cloud on each end inlaid on the headstock. This model was originally priced at $585 with a case ($535 without), which was significantly more than Gibson's J-200, which could be had for $475.

Though the Excellente was in production until 1969, it wasn't a big seller, and only 139 were ever made – making this a very rare bird indeed. This one was built in 1964, making it among the earliest produced, and though it's in very good condition overall, there are a few changes from original spec – electronics have been added, for example. A few small cracks have also been professionally repaired, and these things do have an impact on value.

VITAL STATISTICS

Epiphone FT-120 Excellente

- **PRICE:** £4,999
- **YEAR:** 1964
- **MANUFACTURER:** Epiphone
- **TYPE:** Flat-top acoustic
- **REVERB SELLER:** Guitar Sound reverb.com/shop/guitar-sound
- **SEE MORE:** reverb.com/item/4311441-epiphone-ft-120-excellente-1964-natural

Gibson
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Vintage COLLECTION

20TH CENTURY TOYS

An encounter with Rick Nielsen helped fuel Mike Long's passion for the classics. The owner of Cheltenham's Atoyboy Guitars since 1998, he's bought and sold over 1,500 vintage pieces...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** Photography **Eleanor Jane**

"I was a guitarist from quite a young age. At school, really," remembers Mike Long as we sit among a frankly outrageous selection of electric guitars from Fender and Gibson's golden era, many of which are in their original cases.

"I started playing in various bands in the North Devon area," he continues. "I was always into guitars and I always wanted to strive to get the best guitar I could. But the interest in older guitars quickly became an obsession of mine. When I went to university in Leicester, I was still buying and selling guitars while trying to do my coursework.

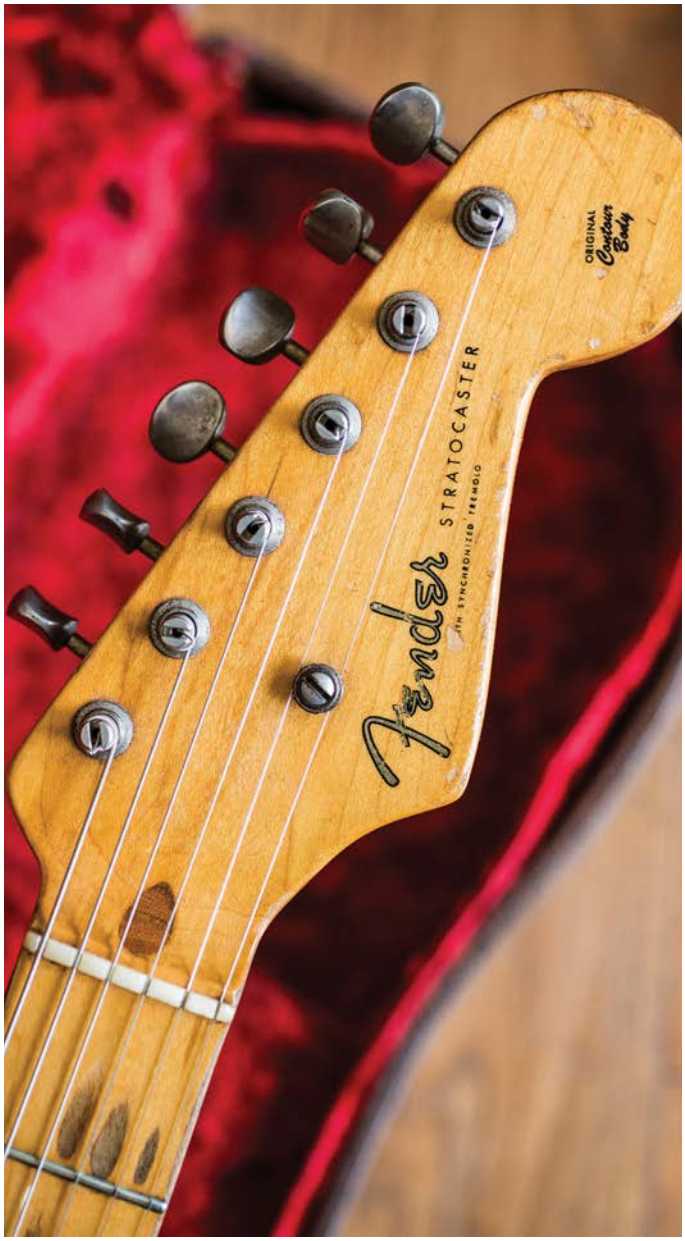
"Also, while I was at university, I was on the entertainment committee, which basically meant that you had to help with the load-in and set-up of the bands. And one of the bands was Cheap Trick. Rick Nielsen came along with probably 150 vintage guitars... Korina Vs, Strats, Blackguard Teles, probably about half a dozen Bursts. Just for a university show in Leicester! I met him backstage and we got on really well and he sort of turned me on to various vintage guitars that were out there and he let me play them. Unbelievable! So by that time I'd really caught the bug."

Wired For Sound

As introductions to the vintage market go, that's pretty impressive. But before collector-grade six-strings became his bread and butter, after leaving university, Mike worked in the music industry for 12 years as a live and studio sound engineer with artists such as Blur,

Opposite **Atoyboy Guitars head honcho Mike Long, holding a super-clean 1957 Les Paul TV Junior**

Above **This transitional 1959 Strat sports a single-ply pickguard and has a mid-1959 body date, making it an early slab rosewood 'board model**



1954 Fender Stratocaster
This very early Strat has a serial number below 0050 and a neck date of 6-54, initialed by Tadeo Gomez. The body has a pencil date mark of 5/54 and the tape in the control cavity is signed 'Gloria' and dated 8 June 1954. It sports the distinctive early features that were gradually phased out throughout the second half of 1954, such as the rounded pickup covers, and is all-original with the exception of later knobs, switch tip and back plate

Manic Street Preachers, PJ Harvey and Spiritualized. This was followed by a venture into pro-audio that evolved into one of Europe's biggest vintage studio gear businesses: "I used to go to Moscow two or three times a year and come back with a suitcase full of Neumann valve microphones," he recalls.

However, during this period Mike was still buying and selling vintage guitars. And when his pro-audio company folded, he started taking guitar sales a lot more seriously. "Since 1999, that's basically all I've been doing," Mike reveals. "I started off on eBay and quickly gained a good reputation for honesty in descriptions. All our auctions started off at 1p with no reserve! Sometimes people got bargains but at that time eBay's fees were very small so even if your profit was only 10 per cent you'd still make something. When eBay raised their fees I made my own website and basically got to where I am now."

"I used to go to Moscow and come back with a suitcase full of Neumann valve microphones"

The Price Is Right

Remarkably, Mike resists the considerable temptation to keep hold of individual guitars, no matter how much he likes them, and every instrument that he owns is for sale: "If I do want a guitar for my own personal use I usually have plenty to choose from. And I hand-pick these, so they're generally ones that I like anyway."

The search for vintage treasures often sees Mike racking up the air miles "all over the world," even if the weakness of the pound since last year's Brexit vote has made Stateside guitar trading less lucrative. "The

in association with Allianz

States isn't as good as it used to be," he admits, "but I'm finding quite a lot of stuff in Europe. I'm often jumping on a plane and going on a hunt, or as Joe Bonamassa calls it, a guitar safari!"

The trophies that Mike brings home from safari are often all-original examples. "Originality tends to be what my customers want," he remarks, "Whether they are players or collectors. It's always been the case with collectors but I'm finding that the newer, younger breed of players who are starting to realise the niceties of guitar are also looking for originality as well.

"It does show how right they got things back in the 50s. People are realising that, and that you don't have to mess around with them too much. There's obviously a market for guitars where people can swap pickups out of them, and the hardware, but at the end of the day the vintage market is geared towards originality. But modded instruments do offer a good opportunity to get into the vintage market. And some mods are reversible – sometimes it's just a question of finding the right hardware and putting it back on."

"People are realising how right they got things back in the 50s. You don't have to mess around with them"

Having traded so many instruments over the years, Mike is no stranger to some of the rarest guitars that the vintage market has to offer.. When we ask what his most prized catch has been so far, he reels off a list: "There's been a few... a 1967 Flying V, a '63 Stratocaster in Olympic White with gold hardware, in mint condition. A black '63 Strat in mint condition. There have been loads of mint condition Les Paul Goldtops from various years. Some of the ones I've had have been in time-capsule condition. It's unreal.

1955 Gibson ES-295
This is one of only a handful of factory red Gibson ES-295 models that are known to have left Kalamazoo, and is in near-mint condition with its original case. Rarity aside, it's a simply wonderful instrument that is very difficult to put down

There was a ’52 Les Paul like that. And recently a ’61 Les Paul SG.”

A couple of his favourites are here today in the shape of a very early Stratocaster and one of only a handful of cherry-finished Gibson ES-295s that are known to exist: “The ’55 ES-295 in Cherry Red is pretty special one, I think. That ’54 Strat has a very low serial number, it’s below 0050 and was made in June 1954.”

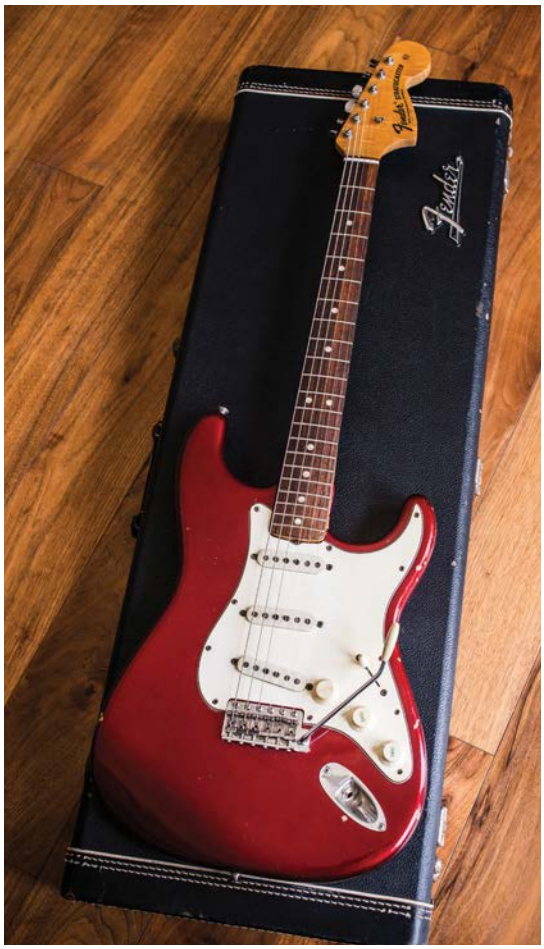
Global GAS

Mike’s customers are often as far-flung as the guitars that he sources, and it’s not unheard of for celebrity players to buy instruments from him. “I also had a Pelham Blue 1966 Gibson ES-335,” he remembers. “I think there’s only one other in existence. That was probably the fastest selling guitar I’ve ever had. I posted it on my Instagram and it had tonnes and tonnes of likes. It was on the website for about an hour and a half and it sold at full price to one of the guitarists from Pearl Jam. Hardly any guitars sell locally – they’re shipped all over the world. All sorts of different people buy them, including rock stars!”

Below right **This rare Sunburst 1967 Custom Telecaster features a maple ’board and is a super-light and resonant example. Its neck is dated October 1967, while the pots date to 1966**

Below right **This original stop tailpiece, 1959 ES-345 is a monster player with original PAFs that has been well used, but not abused**

Below left and opposite **Fender changed the colour of the Candy Apple Red undercoat from silver to gold in the mid-60s. Candy Apple Red guitars with a gold undercoat tend to turn a darker bronze colour than those with silver – in the flesh there’s a noticeable contrast between the finishes on the ’63 Jazzmaster and ’69 Strat pictured here**



Returning to the subject of originality, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the phenomenon of the clean, 'kept under the bed' vintage guitar is now pure fantasy. Not necessarily, says Mike: "People are still coming out of the woodwork with various things that have been passed through generations. That ES-295 was a case in point. It was bought from a Californian dude whose daddy used to own a music store back in the day that sold Gibsons. I get the feeling that's been handed down... then finally I bought it!"

With all this talk of the super-rare, are there any bargains out there for vintage fans on a budget? "Jazzmasters are starting to creep up but they are still under-valued in today's market," Mike opines. "Jaguars as well, although they are a poor man's Jazzmaster in some ways, I think mainly because the pickups aren't quite as meaty. SG Juniors are brilliant guitars that are underpriced as well. Les Paul Juniors have crept up quite a bit over the last couple of years – they've really found a market place, again with emerging players. When they get into Juniors they tend to find with the old P-90 guitars you just need a volume control and you've got all the tones you need, basically."

As we give that gorgeous ES-295 a final strum and prepare to leave, we wonder if there's anything that has so far evaded the grasp of this veteran guitar trader. "Although I've handled and played original 1950s Korinas, I haven't actually sold one, it would be nice to do that," says Mike. "They are great guitars." Now that would be some safari.

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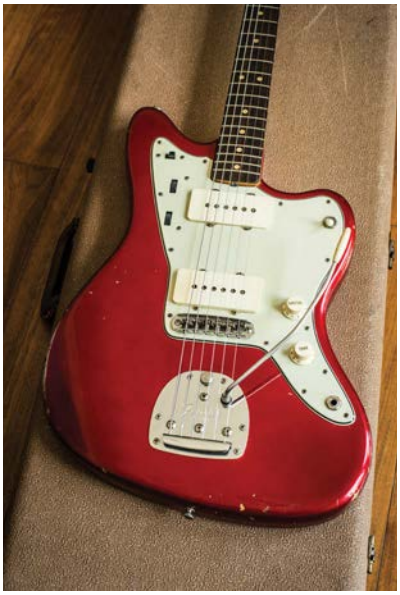

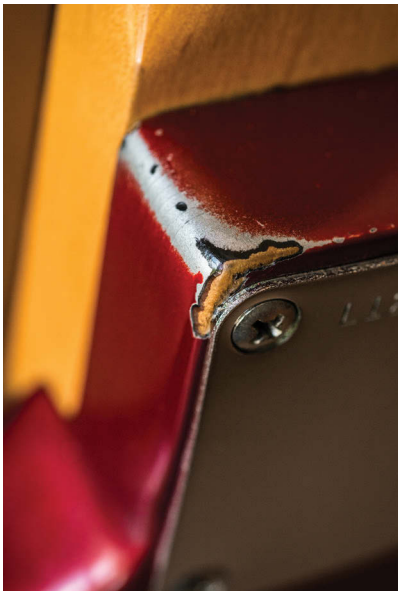

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TUITION

All about... 12-strings

As The Troggs once observed, if you want fairy dust, you have to put a 12 on it. **HUW PRICE** delves into the dozen...

We'd be willing to bet that relatively few of you own a 12-string guitar, and those who do tend to regard them as 'now and again' instruments – that's certainly been the case in popular music as well. Nevertheless, the 12-string's impact far exceeds its status as a reserve team player. Lead Belly loomed large over the 1950s folk revival with his big Stella 12-string de-tuned two whole steps, and without his influence, 1960s music and everything that came after might have been very different.

Fast forward to 1964 and Jim Hall gave George Harrison his 'ticket to chime' – the second Rickenbacker 360/12 ever made – and it features prominently on *A Hard Day's Night*. This in turn inspired long-time folkie Roger McGuinn to make the transition from an acoustic 12 to an electric 12. He stuck with it from the transcendent folk-rock of *Mr Tambourine Man*, through to later high-flying be-bop adventures.

And who could forget that *Stairway To Heaven* prominently features a Fender Electric XII, while Bowie, The Eagles, Tim Buckley, Pink Floyd, Bob Marley, Tom Petty, Neil Young and many others helped to carry the 12-string torch through the 70s.

Eventually it passed to Johnny Marr and Peter Buck in the 1980s, while the likes of Leo Kottke and John Butler exhibited virtuosity on 12-strings that most of us would struggle to match with a regular six-string.

So, it's clear that the 12-string has been a small but significant part of the guitar canon, but how did 12-strings first come about?

Doubling up

Unlike violins, for example, the guitar as we know it today is very different from those made a few hundred years ago. Early guitars had eight or 10 strings, arranged in pairs known as 'courses' – harking back to lute-making traditions, from which the modern guitar likely evolved. The trend in string count was upwards, so guitars went from four to five courses in the 15th and 16th centuries, while six-course guitars were developed in Spain in the 1750s.

Six times two is of course 12, and by the end of the 18th century 12-string instruments were being made all over Europe. By the early 1800s, luthiers such as Joséf Pagés in Cadiz, were building 12-strings that look familiar to the modern eye. A repertoire of music composed for these instruments still survives.

The 12-string remained popular in Spain until the 1830s.

Double-strings were used to enhance the volume and harmonic richness, however string technology was improving. Wire-wound bass strings were becoming the norm, but doubling wire-wound strings led to overpowering bass, because they were much louder than gut strings.

Soon, guitarists were removing the double strings from the bass side, which reduced string tension, so luthiers could make lighter, more responsive tops. As Antonio De Torres' version of the traditional fan bracing pattern became widely adopted, it became possible to achieve volume and definition from single strings. The six-string era had begun in earnest.

Back at 12

The 12-string was down, but not out, and its re-emergence came in the New World rather than the taverns of Madrid or the bordellos of Paris. Even so there is some debate about its revival.

No doubt many 12-string guitars would have made the crossings to South and Central America in the hands of Spanish émigrés. Mexican music is particularly famous for its use of stringed instruments with multiple courses. These include the tiple, charango and cuatro, however it's the bajo sexto that most closely resembles a modern 12-string. The main differences are the bajo sexto's deeper body plus octave strings on only the three lowest courses. The three upper courses are tuned in unison and low to high the traditional tuning is – E2-E1, A2-A1, D3-D2, G2-G2, C3-C3, F3-F3.

Others suggest that Italian immigrants invented the modern 12-string guitar in the instrument-making centres of New York and Chicago. These craftsmen would have specialised in four-course instruments from the mandolin family, and one variant – the Genoese – was a six-course 12-string. What's more, mandolins had used metal strings since the late 1700s.

Given the cultural mix in America during that time, it seems likely that mandolin makers would have wanted a slice of the guitar market. Maybe the American 12-string began as an experiment when a mandolin maker attempted to apply the building methods he knew to a guitar body and neck?

Guitar historian Greg Minor put together an interesting timeline of the 12-string in the USA. He traces it back to a Carl E Brown's February 1886 patent application for a 'Harp Guitar' with four low courses strung in octaves plus two single strings. Once the patent was granted Brown engaged two different

LEFT: The Fender Electric XII had an offset body shape and an innovative bridge design

firms to produce the instrument. Hamilton Gordon made the harp guitar as Brown had designed, however Rene Grunewald combined Brown's design ideas with a more conventional guitar body shape. By 1902 Grunewald had began doubling up the high strings, thus turning the harp guitar into a bona fide 12-string.

Grunewald's guitars were parlour-sized, but soon Holzapfel & Beitel began making a jumbo 12-string, and company records show that they were taking orders around the turn of the 20th century. Measuring slightly over 16 inches across the lower bout, it was well ahead of its time.

Holzapfel's guitar may not have been they first 12-string, but it can certainly lay claim to being the first 'modern' one. Remarkably, father and son continued producing this guitar well into the 1950s and you can find plenty of demos online.

The 12-string caught on with tejano musicians in Texas and blues players. In *Frets*, Michael Simmons postulated that street musicians appreciated the fuller sound and greater volume of the 12-string because it allowed them to perform solo and so keep all the money for themselves.

Notable blues, ragtime and folk musicians who played 12-strings include Blind Blake, Skip James, Blind Willie McTell and Lead Belly. Blues aficionados may argue, but most agree that all of them played big-bodied Stellas either exclusively or occasionally.

Stellas were strong, well made and affordable. In contrast Martin seemed disinclined to get into 12-strings and company records show that only six were made on special order prior to WWII. The first, a 000-18 12-string made in 1913, was braced for steel strings. It was only as a result of the 50s folk boom that Martin, Gibson and Guild introduced 12-strings to their regular product lines.

Electric 12s

It's hard to pinpoint the very first electric 12-string guitar, but the Danelectro Bellzouki is one of the very earliest. Introduced in 1961, the guitar was dreamt up by East Coast session player, Vinnie Bell. The 7010 model had one lipstick pickup, and the later 7020 had a modified body with a second pickup. Soon after, Rickenbacker got in on the game, and in 1963, three 12-string electric prototypes were produced.

This became the 360/12 and was followed by the 370/12 and the bizarre 366/12 that used a mechanical device to convert from 12 to 6 strings. Rickenbacker electric 12s are characterised by narrow necks and closely spaced strings. Rickenbacker also deviated from usual practice by reversing the order of the octave strings, so players would hit the lower tuned strings first on the down stroke.

Fender's response was 1965's Electric XII, with its offset solid body and a gawky 'hockey stick' headstock, plus a clever bridge design providing intonation adjustment for individual strings. Utilising the same neck, the Coronado XII followed in 1967 with a semi-acoustic body and DeArmond pickups.

Gibson has made 12-string versions of the ES-335, Firebird and the SG, but it's best known 12-strings are its double-necks. When faced with the challenge of recreating their album tracks in concert, rockers such as Jimmy Page and Don Felder reached for a Gibson EDS-1275, which featured 12- and six-string necks on a widened SG body.

Various tricks have been used to try and replicate the 12-string sound with six-string guitars. Nashville-strung acoustics can provide 12-string chime without the low frequency clutter, and if you're recording onto tape, you can create a high octave effect by tracking the part with the machine running at half-speed. Combine it with the same part at regular speed and hey presto!

Other 12-string simulation attempts have been made with chorus pedals and harmonisers but none of the above can compete with the lush, complex and ethereal tones of a real 12-string guitar. Fortunately there are still plenty out there to choose from and even some of the vintage ones remain relatively affordable today.

Chord Clinic

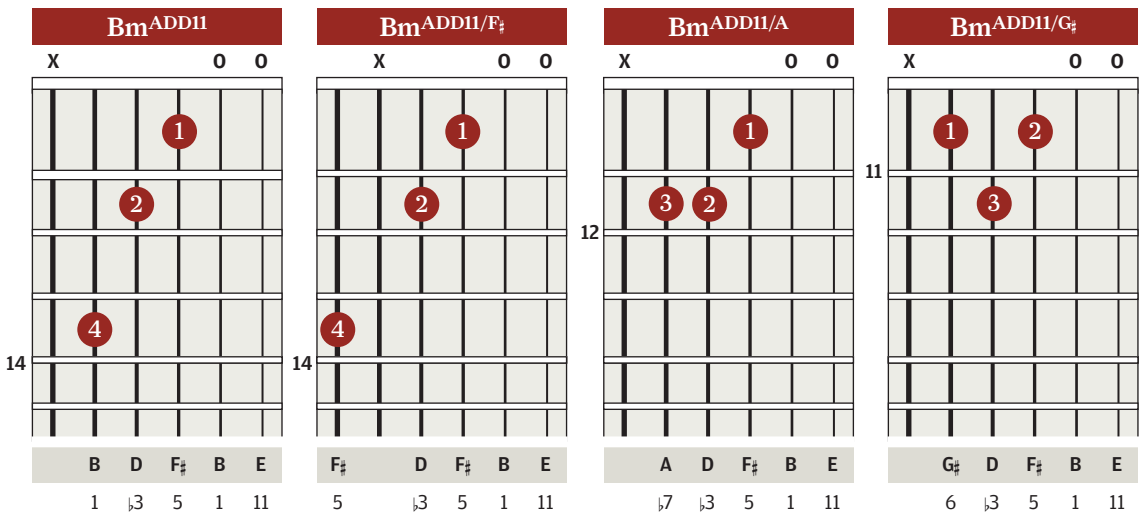
This month we continue our examination of the rich textures that can arise when high position chords are mixed with open strings. **ROD FOGG** gives thanks for cutaways...

We start off this month with a high position B minor triad, which combines well with the open E and B strings to produce Bmadd11 chord. Fingerstyle arpeggios work best in this situation – play a pattern that uses all five strings, starting with your thumb on the A string. Then play through the four chords in figure 1, keeping the arpeggio the same but changing the bass note. On our Strat with a clean sparkly sound, we find an evocative chord sequence that would make a good intro or verse for a song.

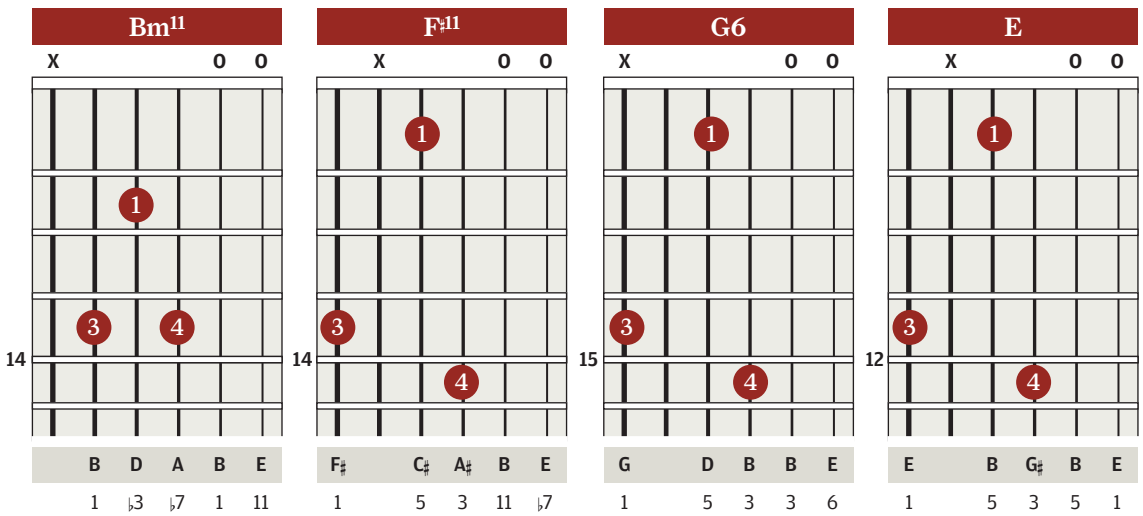
Figure 2 develops this idea, starting this time on Bm11 (the note A, the minor seventh, has been added) and then moving around some widely spaced major triads while all the time the open E and B strings act as pedal notes. These big stretches become more feasible in the higher positions on the guitar, though you could always re-finger the fifth of the chord onto the A string. However, there is something inherently neat about keeping the upper notes of these chords on the top four strings and it helps with the picking.

Deserting the upper reaches of the guitar just for a moment, we go in search of more

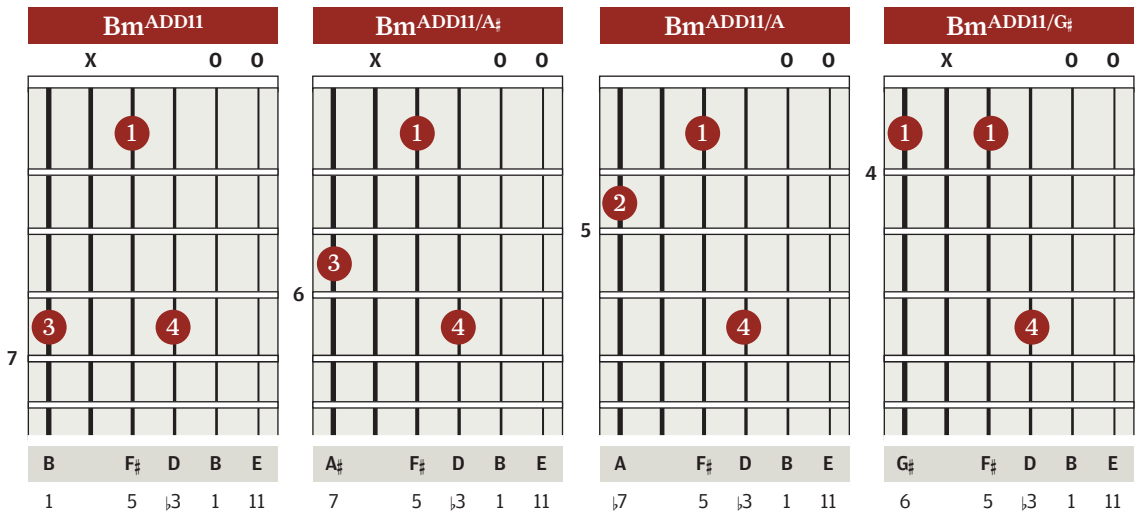
Adding To The Noise (Fig 1)



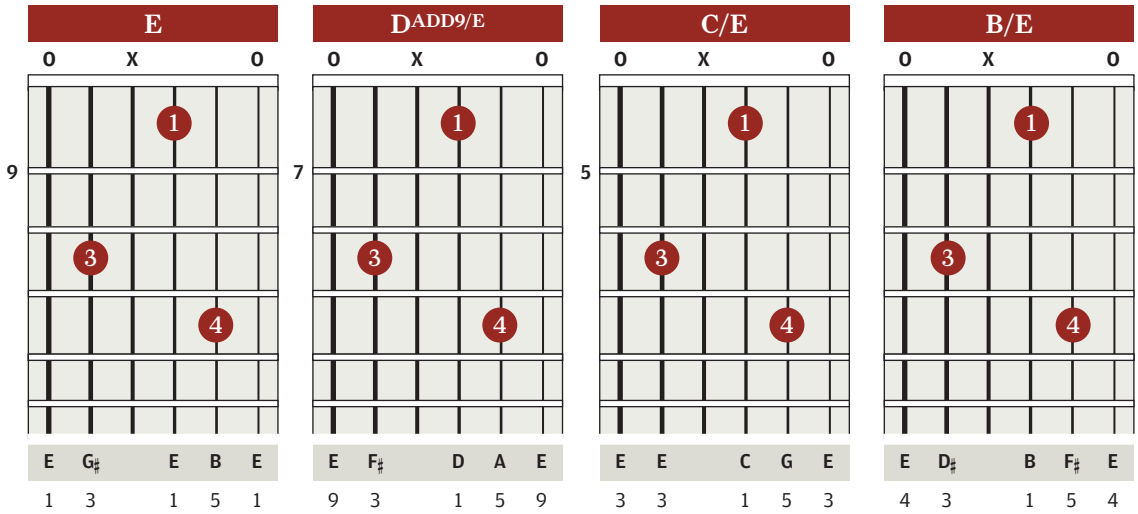
Pedal Tones To The Metal (Fig 2)



Legs Eleven (Fig 3)



Flamenco Flavours (Fig 4)



fun in the key of B minor – don't ever say we don't know how to party! Figure 3 grabs the major triad that we used in the last three chords, turns it into a minor chord and then slides down to the seventh fret to produce a lower voicing of Bmadd11. From there, fret by fret, we do a descending bassline, keeping the upper notes of the chord closely spaced by again mixing in the open strings. Notice that in the chord with the G♯ bass you have to have your index finger flat in a barre, but only on the bottom three strings. It will have to stop the A string, too, so make sure you avoid picking that string.

Next, we are going to imagine the guitar as a kind of E string sandwich. Though not particularly tasty, you have a high E and a low E, and the other four strings are the filling in the middle. In figure 4, we decide to just use three strings, starting with an E major triad in first inversion and moving it down the guitar to produce D, C and B majors, with a pedal E in the bass and a high pedal E as well. Try

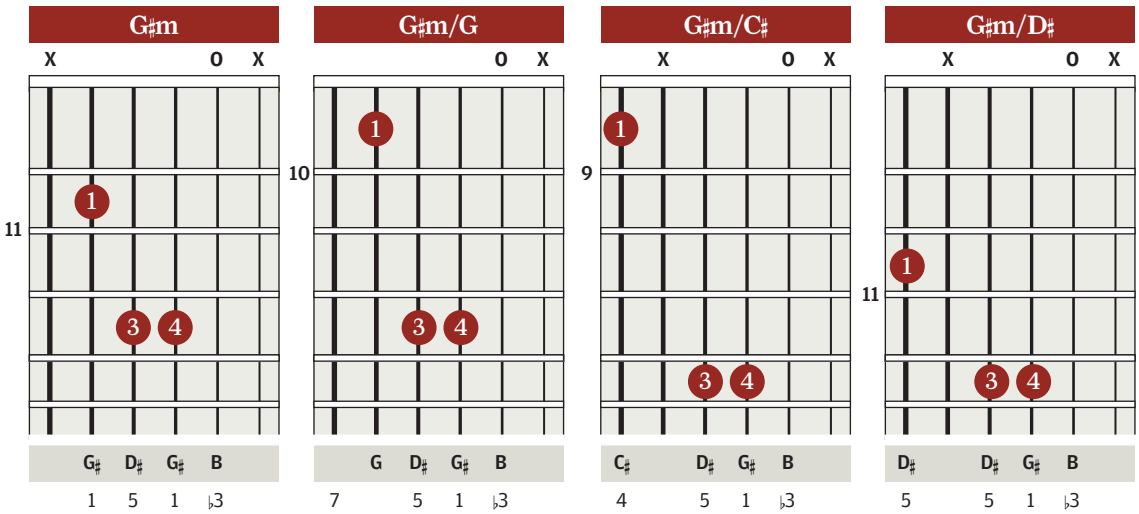
starting on an E minor chord instead – just turn the G♯ into a G natural – and then carry on as before. This seems to introduce a slight flamenco flavour to the sequence. If you wanted to, you could carry this shape on down to A major, or A minor, and then try playing the chords in any order you like and see what you come up with.

Getting back to the higher positions of the guitar, and as part of our long-term quest play in interesting keys, consider for a moment that the open B string is the minor third of a G♯ minor chord. Figure 5 begins with a root position G♯ minor chord which contains the same four notes as the one you might play at the fourth fret with a half barre. But it sounds so much more interesting to play in this high position with an open string mixed in. We've taken the bassline in a different direction this time including a big stretch down to C♯. See if you can make up another bassline that works in a similar way.

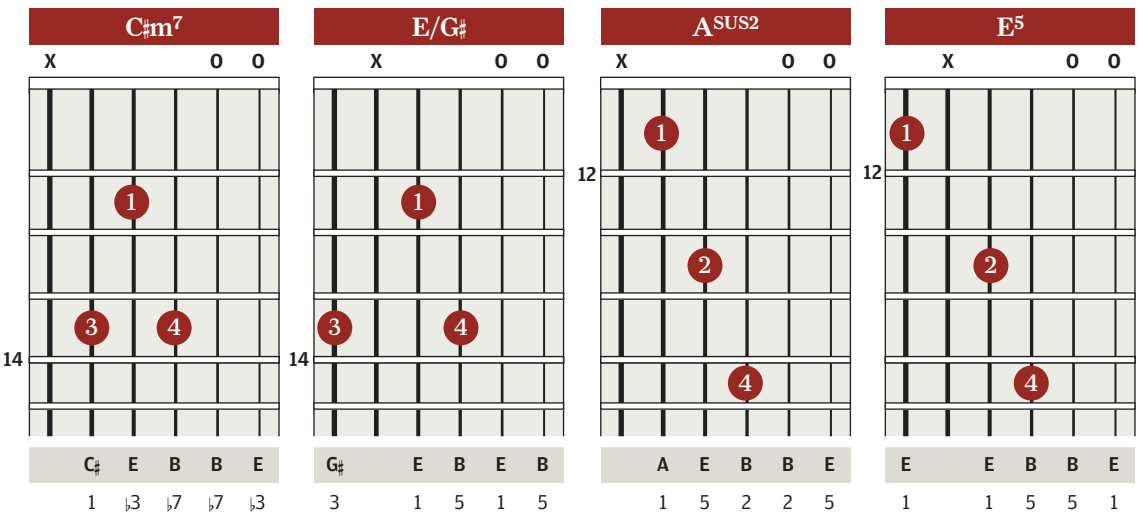
Returning for a moment to the first chord in figure 2, played two frets higher it makes a C♯m7 chord, with the open B and E strings doubling the third and seventh of the chord respectively. In figure 6, changing the bass note creates an interesting series of chords in the key of E major. For once, you don't have to worry about fingerpicking as this sequence sounds bright and chimey played with a pick. We tried it with lots of fast downstrokes and where necessary used the tip or underside of a fret-hand finger to mute either the A or E string.

As always, these examples are intended as starting points for your own experiments, so we hope you can have some fun with them. Thanks are due to Dave Keuning of The Killers for coming up with the guitar riff to *Mr Brightside*, which inspired many of these high position chord sequences we've been looking at over the last two sessions. See you next month!

Root Maneuvers (Fig 5)



Free Bassing (Fig 6)



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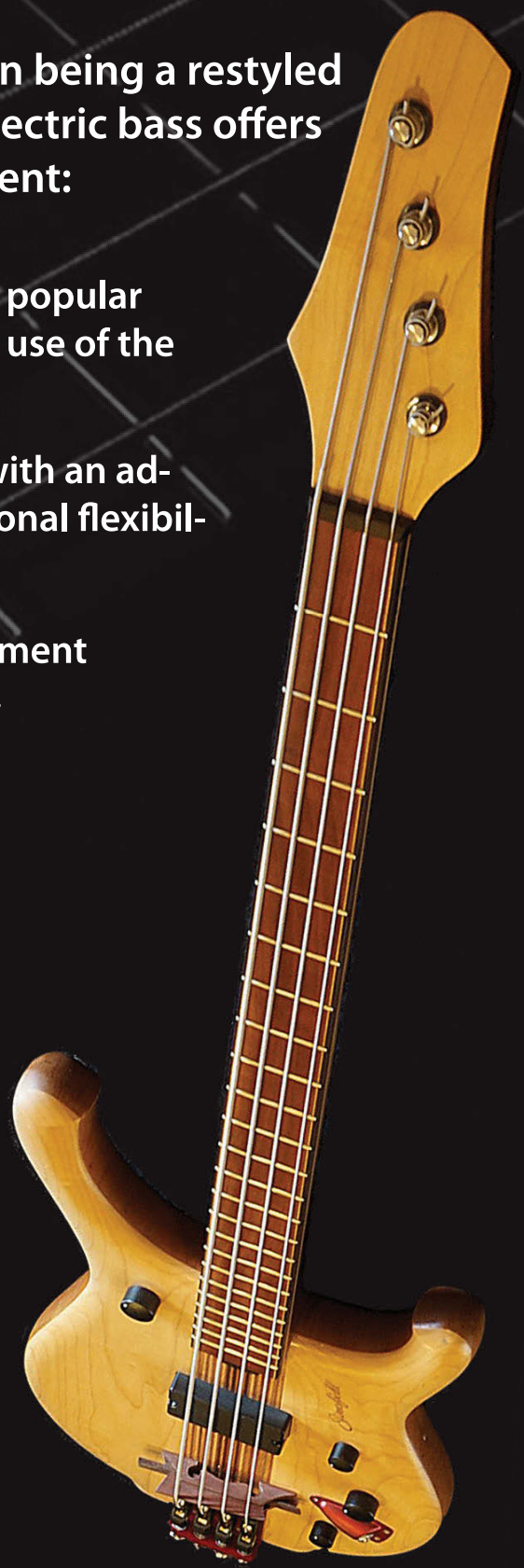

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: the craft beer suggestion has provoked an awful lot of feedback...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Still Got The Brews

Dear *TGM*, reading last month's letter of the month [Hail To The Ale, August 2017], I have to say my first thought was that an article on beer should have no place in a guitar magazine. But then I had a second thought – two of my favourite things in one place... it could be a winning combination!

As for names for the column, how about '12-bar Brews' or perhaps 'Top Of The Hops'. Possibly 'Bar Chords' or even 'Bottle of the Bands'. Maybe 'Blues & Booze' or why not 'Pickup A Pint'. There's always 'BAS' (Beer Acquisition Syndrome) or finally 'Bottleneck'.

If your beer reviews are as good as your gear reviews, I look forward to auditioning your recommendations.

Paul G, via email

TGM Ken Willis' email suggesting we feature something about craft beer in the magazine has certainly provoked some strong reactions, both for and against. Paul's obviously getting on board with some excellent pun-tastic suggestions, but not everyone's quite so enamoured. Such was the volume of correspondence we received on this suggestion, we decided to devote the whole of this month's Feedback page to your feelings on the subject...

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**Letter of the month prize is subject to availability and may change*

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us at *The Guitar Magazine, Anthem Publishing, Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively, get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Hopping Mad

Hi *TGM*, glad to see the magazine name change hasn't meant very many changes to the content – still the same great mix of reviews of old and new gear.

However, when you published my letter in the Feb 2017 issue, I didn't mention my interest in model railways or motor sport – two hobbies that are no doubt enjoyed by a load of other readers, and I certainly didn't ask for additional pages in the mag to be used to cover these topics.

If I should want to read about 'craft beers', whatever they are (being teetotal I have no idea – probably similar to 'artisan' baking – naff and twice the price!), I would go and buy a mag about them or look it up on 'tinterweb. Some may play better with some inside them but alcohol and drugs have seen off too many of our great players in the past.

Stick to your great coverage of guitars and leave the beer to CAMRA.

Tony Bagwell, via email

Tony, until you've enjoyed a slice of organic San Francisco-style sourdough toast of a Saturday morning, you don't know what you're missing. In all seriousness though, we hear you. One of the selling points of craft beer is that it's designed to be enjoyed and appreciated in moderation – we would never encourage people to over-indulge or drink to excess, no matter how tasty the beer is, and especially before a gig.

Booze, Your Illusion

Hi, I just finished reading my August 2017 issue of what's once again *The Guitar Magazine*. Great to see that the content hasn't changed, as it's great as it is, and it's the reason I subscribe to the mag.

I've just read the Letter Of The Month, headed 'Hail to the Ale', and I'm concerned, to say the least. *TGM*'s response to the suggestion that the mag should have a page dedicated to craft beers was, "It's definitely something we'll consider doing in some way or another".

Really? What about a page dedicated to whiskey or gin? What about a page dedicated to shoes or beard trimmers? Come on *TGM*, keep it real.

Phil, via email

Never fear Phil, we wouldn't dream of letting anything take the place of the usual guitar stuff we all love...

Foaming With Laughter

Hi *TGM*, after reading last month's letter of the month, I just wanted to propose a suggestion for the name of your craft beer column – what do you think of 'Malty Effects'?

Jason Arthur, via email

And we round it off with perhaps the finest pun of the lot – hats off to you Jason. Jokes aside, however, we hear and understand the points of view from both sides, and we're taking it all on board. And don't worry, we'll be back to the usual guitar stuff next month!

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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven releases and reissues

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

The War On Drugs
A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Three years removed from *Lost In The Dream* – the album that made The War On Drugs critical darlings of the indie-rock scene – Adam Granduciel has returned with another sprawling, ambitious epic that straddles grunge, classic rock and psychedilia. The Philadelphian guitarist has said that this turned out more of a 'band' record than TWOD's previous efforts, and indeed on several tracks the guitar takes a back seat to the keyboards of Robbie Bennett and David Hartley's dynamic and melodic bass playing.

The rich, layered production still leaves plenty of room for Granduciel's inventive atmospheric guitar lines, however, with lashings of the chorus- and phaser-heavy reverbed arpeggios and riffs that made *Lost In The Dream* sound so unlike anything else in the modern alternative world right now. It's a sonic gumbo that simultaneously sounds both old and new – smashing together musical touchstones of the 70s, 80s and 90s to create something that feels different to all of them. Despite the broader instrumental focus, there are guitar highlights aplenty here – the anthemic riff of *Strangest Thing*, played in unison with the keys, is only capped by a soaring, sustaining solo that brings the song to an euphoric climax. *Pain*, meanwhile, has the most similar vibe to *Lost In The Dream*, with its bedrock of chiming delay-heavy arpeggios and edge-of-breakup phased single-note riff again breaking into another triumphant solo.

From the energetic piano-led opening salvo of *Up All Night* to the ethereal heartbreak of closer, *You Don't Have To Go*, *A Deeper Understanding* fulfils the massive potential we glimpsed in *Lost In The Dream*. It's an album that takes you on a journey through a lush, endlessly inviting wash of sound, without ever losing its way or outstaying its welcome. **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Arcade Fire, Real Estate*

Prophets Of Rage
PROPHETS OF RAGE

You'd be forgiven for thinking that you'd stumbled upon a Rage Against The Machine B-sides album with Prophets Of Rage's debut. And that's no great surprise given that the band is just RATM with rap legends B-Real and Chuck D replacing Zach de la Rocha up front. The problem is that at times it feels a bit like a covers band wheeling out their original material.

Unfuck The World is a churlish yet endearing homage to de la Rocha, echoing the timelessness of RATM and early Public Enemy. But their claims of "coming together to combat the storm" feel a bit forced, and anyone expecting the intelligence and conviction of their early work will find *The Counteroffensive* borderline unlistenable. *Take Me Higher* aims to replicate Chuck D and B-Real's funk background, but again, just ends up sounding a bit gimmicky.

The intent of Prophets Of Rage is commendable, but the vague focus and lackluster delivery makes it feel like they're shouting through a megaphone without much to say. **KS**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *RATM, Public Enemy, Cypress Hill*

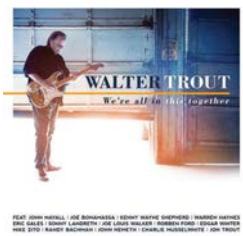
Martin Simpson
TRAILS AND TRIBULATIONS

Beginning with a strident version of Jackson C Frank's classic traveller's ballad *Blues Run The Game*, Martin Simpson's latest album – his 20th solo record and the follow-up to 2013's *Vagrant Songs* – has a specifically journeyman outlook, blending the traditional folk music that's Simpson's stock-in-trade with a Transatlantic flavour. This is reflected in the instrumentation, with Simpson taking care of Weissenborn, electric guitar, banjo and ukulele duties as well as acoustic, resonator and vocals. Among the guests are rising folk star John Smith (who adds electric guitar), Ben Nicholls on bass, Nancy Kerr on fiddle and Andy Cutting on accordion, and they're used sparingly to add atmosphere and sonic depth – especially on the driving *East Kentucky*. Chief among the numerous inventive solo performances is the arrangement of *St James Hospital* as a haunting, slide-infused folk-blues. Throughout, Simpson proves that after a 40-year-career, he's the master of his trade. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bert Jansch, Martin Carthy*

Walter Trout
WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER



For his 26th album, blues-rock survivor Walter Trout has gathered together 14 talented musicians – including old friends, A-list guitarists and his guitar-playing son Jon – for a joyous collaboration that follows up 2015's remarkable, emotional *Battle Scars*, which chronicled the guitarist's battle with liver failure.

Trout matched songs to the featured musicians on the album, so there are highlights throughout for blues-rock guitar lovers: Robben Ford brings sophisticated phrasing to Bluesbreakers-esque workout *Mr Davis*; Warren Haynes adds lachrymose slide to *The Sky Is Crying*; Eric Gales unleashes fireworks over *Somebody Goin' Down*; and John Nemeth smears grimy harp across *Too Much To Carry*. Joe Bonamassa also lends his talents to the album-closing title track, while *Do You Still See Me At All* is a nice moment between father and son. Throughout it all, Walter shows how flexible his style is by melding perfectly with them all, making for a hugely enjoyable listen for blues fans everywhere. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Joe Bonamassa*

Iron & Wine
BEAST EPIC

Sam Beam cites his sixth solo full-length as an album about, "the beauty and pain of growing up after you've already grown up", so it's perhaps fitting that he's chosen to channel that through a sound that dispenses with much of extra instrumentation that's characterised his recent efforts, and returned to the stripped-back arrangements of his earliest output.

The bedrock remains Beam's breathy, delicate voice, which has always weaved so well with the intricately fingerpicked country-tinged acoustic guitar that brought him so much early acclaim. Here, it's ornamented only with minimalist, delicate drums, plus the occasional interlude of soaring pedal-steel, strings and moody keys when required.

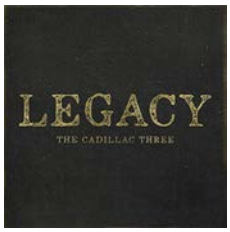
The whole thing was recorded live with minimal overdubs and it leads to a laid-back, slow-burn record – the live room mojo giving gentle picking of *Summer Clouds* and *Bitter Truth* a wonderfully organic, rootsy vibe. It's not all slow-jams, however, and the likes of *Call It Dreaming*, a driving John Martyn-esque picker, ably demonstrates Beam's more technical side. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Nick Drake, John Martyn*

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

Our pick of the best other guitar releases this month...



The Cadillac Three
LEGACY

Jonny Lang
SIGNS

Robin Trower
TIME AND EMOTION

Richard Thompson
ACOUSTIC CLASSICS II

Manchester Orchestra
A BLACK MILE TO THE SURFACE

Mike Rutherford

The Genesis and Mike & The Mechanics instrumentalist on cowbells, slippery stages, and the power of powerchords...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I couldn't live without my bass pedals. They're the most important thing to what I do, because when I write I've got a guitar plugged into an amp. Very often I'll be writing and it'll be one chord or three notes, and it's the pedals that provide the movement. I also play some very weird notes that you'd never put on afterwards! When you're writing you can be experimental, but when the song's done, and you add bass, it's harder to be brave, because you've got used to it. Sometimes I'd play with delay and it creates a big sound, and sometimes I trigger it with a cowbell, so it's a big part of what I do."

2 In another life I'd be...
"Well, believe it or not, my father wanted me to be in the Foreign Office – which wouldn't have happened! – but I actually wanted to be a journalist. God knows why! You know when you're young and you just think, 'Yeah that's something I could be involved in'. But I think that in the end I made the right choice!"

3 The moment it all started...
"*You Really Got Me* was the most exciting thing I'd ever heard. It was either that or hearing The Beatles. That early Beatles sound... it was raw and exciting. They had three guys singing together – prior to that it was the crooner with the band behind him. I hear the songs today now compared to those and I think, 'Is this just nostalgia?' And it's not – they still sound bloody good!"

4 The one that got away...
"I had a guitar synth called the ARP Avatar, and it had this fuzz sound. You had a little pickup under the guitar, and every string had a different signal. So instead of when you play a chord with normal fuzz you get these crunchy mixed up notes, this one gave you a lovely clean fuzz: the notes didn't ever clash. But then about 20 years ago I went, 'Nah, had enough of that!' But it was the most original sound."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"That last Genesis tour we did *I Can't Dance*, and we do the *I Can't Dance* Walk down some steps along the stage and then back up. But on the way back up the steps, it's been raining, I slipped, and my foot gets trapped between the steps so I'm stuck! I had to get the crew to come and get me out! But I finished the song – it's just very uncool!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"'Don't pretend something's good'. If you write a song, it's easy to go 'Oh that's great' [chuckles]. It's being honest with yourself – you know what's special. Most things aren't – they're just okay. People say 'Does it get any easier?' but it actually gets harder, because the older you get the less you can kid yourself, which is annoying. [laughs]"

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I love the bass, but you can't really play it on your own, it's a bit boring! I probably play *Spoonful* by Cream – it's just a great sound."

8 The most important thing that's on my rider...
"I don't drink before the show – any more! But I have a glass of wine three quarters of the way through [the set]. Then as the tour carries on, every few weeks, the wine glass comes out a song earlier [laughs] – luckily the tour is only six weeks long so it doesn't get out of hand!"

9 My guilty pleasure...
"Heavy metal powerchords! In the early days the fans that came to see Genesis were predominantly male, in denim jackets, and on the back was 'Genesis' and 'Motörhead'! I think there's a similarity between Genesis fans and heavy music. That fuzzy sound is something that I always love messing around with – but at home, not at soundcheck!"

10 If I could play one thing...
I never learned *Blackbird* – it isn't that hard, but I started and never quite finished it off! Then you have Anthony who plays in The Mechanics, he knows every riff, every song... and I can't even remember my own!"

Mike & The Mechanics' new album, *Let Me Fly*, is out now on BMG

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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